

SPEECHES

OF THE LATE

Right Honourable

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

AS HE APPEARED IN PARLIAMENT.

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SPEECHES

OF THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN.

JANUARY 2, 1795.

REPEAL OF THE BILL FOR SUSPENDING THE
HABEAS CORPUS ACT.

MR. SHERIDAN said he should take the earliest opportunity he could of submitting to that house a question, which was, whether the habeas corpus act, and all the advantages which the people of this country had derived under it, should or should not be restored; and whether the respect and veneration with which we had been accustomed to regard the trial by jury, and the esteem and deference which had been generally given to verdicts, should be continued, or be entirely eradicated from the public mind? He alluded to the bill for the suspension of the habeas corpus act, which had passed last session, under an idea of a plot existing in this country, and of the decision of a jury that no such plot existed. He, therefore, gave notice, that on Monday next, he should move for leave to bring in a bill to repeal the act of the last session of parliament for the suspension of the habeas corpus act.

CITY MILITIA BILL.

Mr. Sheridan observed, perhaps the house was waiting for the minister. A question of great importance, respecting the navy of Great Britain, had been put, and no lord of the Admiralty was present to answer it. He was in the same unpleasant situation; for he had a matter of importance, and particularly interesting to the city of London, to bring forward, but he did not see any of the members for that city in their places; perhaps they, too, like the lords of the Admiralty, might think it beneath their dignity to attend to it. He now, however, gave notice, that on Monday he should have something to say relative to the city militia act.

LOAN.

Mr. Fox wished to be informed when the subject of the loan was to be discussed; Mr. Rose said he was not able to afford the information, but he had no doubt the Chancellor of the Exchequer would be in the house on Monday, and give it.

Mr. Sheridan said, this was quite an unlucky day for information. A question had been put to the lords of the Admiralty, upon the state of the navy, and they had remained silent; he had something to ask of the members for the city of London, but they were not present; his right honorable friend wanted information upon the loan, the minister was absent, and the only answer was, "That there would be time between this and Monday, for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make up his mind upon the matter." The truth was, the minister did not pay any attention to the rules and forms of the house. When a question concerning a supply, to be granted for carrying on the war, came on, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was absent: he would come at a future time, to tell the house how he intended to dispose of the supply. Most unquestionably, in point of decency, the Chancellor of the Exche-

quer ought to be present; but that was out of the question, for all the proceedings of granting supplies were such as he expected not to be debated, they were to be granted as of course, and no information was to be had on points to which such supplies related.

Mr. Rose replied.

Mr. Sheridan said, Mr. Rose had made the matter much worse by what he had said, for now he had accused the Chancellor of the Exchequer of never doing his duty, on an occasion, which he still must think peculiarly required his attendance. He could not agree with the honorable gentleman, that this was a mere matter of course; for it certainly was possible that several members might think it improper to grant a supply at all without enquiry previously made into the objects for which the supply was to be granted; and His Majesty's ministers ought to attend for the purpose of giving satisfaction to any enquiries thought necessary to be made. He had been misunderstood as to what he had said on the forms of the house; he had asserted, and still persisted in the assertion, that no reliance could be placed on the right honorable gentleman's observance of the forms of the house, because he was notorious for a breach of them; and therefore, they could not have any great security that the forms of the house, in this case, would not be broken through, especially when they had already been violated by the unconstitutional measures of negotiating a loan before the sitting of parliament, and previous to a knowledge whether the supplies for which that loan was made, would meet with the approbation of the house. They had an additional reason to fear in this case, when they remarked on the unusual manner in which parliament had been prorogued, not for the purpose of negotiating a treaty, nor for the purpose of making peace, or to do any service to the country; but merely that the minister might

be able to make his loan in this unconstitutional manner.

Mr. Steele said this was not the proper time to consider whether the minister had acted properly or not, in his making the loan, that would be best known when the loan came to be considered.

Mr. Sheridan thought this was not an improper time to take into consideration the question of the loan; on the contrary, this was the very time he should chuse to discuss it, if the minister had been present. The house was reduced to a most extraordinary situation; there were, among its members, many opulent men; he hoped there always would be such men in the house. Now, it was a very reasonable supposition, that many of these persons were interested in the loan; it was, therefore, clear, they did not come fairly and freely to consider the subject, for they must of course be biassed, and would wish, the supplies voted would be sufficient to give them all the advantage they expected from their bargain. It was not a fact that parliament had ever considered it as a light matter to break through a bargain, into which the minister had entered for a loan; the language held in that house had always been, that it was improper to break through a bargain without some weighty and important reason to justify it. As to the loan to the Emperor, he said, he could not give credit to any of the reports circulated on that subject, because he did not believe, after the experience we had had of the faith of our allies, any man would come down to the house without a mask, and offer them so bold and barefaced an imposition. He did not conceive such effrontery was possible.

Mr. Pitt having entered the house and replied to Mr. Sheridan; Mr. Fox and other members having also spoken,

Mr. Sheridan rose again—He had heard many things asserted in the course of the debate, which he thought open to a ready answer from the meanest understanding, but having troubled the commit-

tee so often, he had remained silent. There had however arisen a new circumstance—The answer given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the doubts of a worthy baronet (Sir William Milner,) had caused a discussion of the utmost importance. Nothing could be of more importance than to ascertain, from the mouth of the minister an explicit declaration of the real causes and objects of the war. His right honorable friend (Mr. Fox) had said, he understood him on this subject. Conscious of the superior quickness of intellect which his right honorable friend possessed, he had no doubt but his right honorable friend had comprehended his meaning; but for himself, he must plainly say, that after constantly watching the minister on this subject, he had uniformly found him giving an apparently plain opinion; and then, when pressed for a little explanation, cloathing that opinion in such a multiplicity of words, that in proportion as he professed himself to be intelligible, he had found him utterly obscure. The point now to be ascertained was, What was the prospect of the minister's present deliberation as to the object of the war? Mr. Sheridan quoted all Mr. Pitt's different declarations and explanations on this subject, which he shewed went to establish these points:—First, that no treaty could be had with the present government of France—then, that no negotiation could be entered into with them, till a government of our choice was imposed upon them—or until we were justified in treating with them, by being wholly subdued, and completely at their mercy. In short, he would put Mr. Pitt's declarations, which had been detailed in many sentences, in a very few words—'The present ministers would give peace to England whenever we should conquer France, or whenever France should conquer us—it was a declaration of insanity; and if the house of commons or the country supported him after this declaration, they must be as mad as the maniac that deluded them.

A resolution "That a supply be granted to his majesty" was put and carried, and the report ordered to be received on the following day.

JANUARY 5.

CITY MILITIA BILL.

Mr. SHERIDAN observed, that this bill was hurried through the house with unexampled and indecent precipitancy, and when he opposed it as an infringement of the chartered rights of the citizens of London, he was told, he was interfering in a matter for which the citizens of London would not be obliged to him, for they had considered the principle of the bill, and approved of it. The fact, however, was the reverse; the citizens had not then an opportunity of understanding the bill completely, and what they did understand of it, they disapproved of highly. It was not his view to catch at temporary popularity, by affecting to feel for the rights of persons, for whom he had no real concern; the truth was, he considered the bill in question as a gross violation of the rights of a very respectable body of men, whom it was the common duty of all the members of that house to esteem and respect: but to shew he had no desire of thrusting himself forward in this business, he would decline it altogether, if he should find the members for the city were disposed to do their duty to their constituents upon this subject. What he wished to know at this moment was—Whether it was the intention of these honorable gentlemen to bring forward a motion for the repeal of the city militia bill, or to propose some regulation of it? He desired an answer to that question.

Mr. Alderman Curtis said, that a committee had been appointed in the city to examine into this subject, and they had not yet made their report; and, therefore, he could not give all the information he could wish. But with regard to the principle of the bill, he would venture to say that it was approved of by a large majority of

the citizens of London. This he collected from the meetings which had taken place upon this subject.

Mr. Alderman Anderson said, that many attempts had been made to impose on the understandings of the citizens of London upon this subject, but they would not swallow the poison, however palatable the dose was made up; the majority of the citizens were decidedly in favor of the bill. He observed that Mr. Sheridan had said the members for London were not present on Friday, Mr. Anderson said he was in the house at a quarter of an hour after four o'clock, and he begged leave to say, he attended the house, he believed, as frequently as any member did, and he trusted that none of these reflections would be thrown out again. He understood the honorable gentleman had said, in the hearing of some persons, that he should have some observations to make to-day, if the members for the city should attend their duty.

Mr. Sheridan said he did not wish to dispute with the honorable member, whether or not the avocations which he had to fill; were or were not, of a nature superior to the attendance of his duty in parliament. He did not, he said, make a merit of his own attendance, as he conceived every man who aspired to a seat in that house, must at least know that attendance was a part of his duty. With regard to his having promised to make some observations upon this subject to-day, in the hearing of any body in that house, he certainly did not make that promise in the hearing of any body, for he did not make it at all. As to the popularity of the bill, the gentleman who had asserted that, would do well to revise that opinion; he insisted the bill was disrelished, a proof of which was, they had suspended it, and not acted upon it, and in the populous ward of Farringdon, they had bound their common council to endeavor by all means to get it repealed.

REPEAL OF THE BILL FOR SUSPENDING THE HABEAS CORPUS ACT.

Mr. Sheridan said, that in addressing the house upon a subject of the most important consideration, he by no means wished to mix his own opinions with what he should lay before them, but simply to bring forward what was the real state of facts.

He was perfectly well aware, that in the present calamitous situation of the country, it might have been expected that he should direct attention to the war, rather than to any other topic; and, to bring forward another subject, might appear to have a tendency to divert their attention from that which was the principal object of discussion. He was also aware, that there was something risked by the motion which he was now to submit to the house, as it probably would not meet with the concurrence of all those who, on the first night of the session, had expressed their disapprobation of the war, and now, while an appearance of strength was gathering to the party in opposition of the present war, the effect might be to produce a degree of public discouragement, and to diminish the hopes which were entertained of bringing it to a speedy conclusion. But there were some questions of essential and deep importance, which no ground of expedience, no consideration of a nature merely temporary, should induce him to forego. Such was the question which he should to-night bring forward. The opposers of the war, who had encountered so much unpopularity at its onset, would stand on the same ground on the present occasion, in supporting the principles which they had uniformly avowed, whatever they might hazard by the discussion, with respect to the appearance of the strength of their party. Those who had joined them in the opposition to war, would consider how far it was incumbent upon them to support the same principles. But he should affirm that the present was the very first question which those who wished for peace were bound to support. The first consideration which had been held out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer with respect to the necessity of the war, was the internal situation of the country. A view of that situation was certainly in every respect the most important. Whether we now looked to the continuance of the war, or to the event of

peace, it was of consequence to ascertain whether the subjects of this country were actuated by a loyal attachment to the King, and an unshaken zeal for the constitution, or were under the influence of opposite sentiments. The right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had asked, if we should make peace, what would be the consequence of the inundation of French principles into this country? He, for one, did not dread the consequence. But the right honorable gentleman had rightly taken his ground, if he supposed the people of England actuated by seditious and treasonable sentiments, and ready on the first opportunity to sacrifice all the blessings which they enjoyed from the admirable form of their constitution, and madly to destroy themselves. This was the point on which he was prepared to meet him. The question was not whether the habeas corpus should remain suspended till February, though an honorable gentleman (Mr. Dundas) had thought proper to declare, by anticipation, that in the present situation of things, he should be of opinion that the suspension ought to be renewed; if he (Mr. Sheridan) thought that there remained no ground for suspending it, no consideration of the shortness of time would induce him to withdraw his motion, he would say, with the father of the right honorable gentleman (the Earl of Chatham) who, when he was asked whether he would submit to a tyranny of forty days, answered, No; he would not consent that the people of England should be fettered and shackled even for an hour: but the question now was, Whether the habeas corpus should remain suspended for ever? Another consideration connected with his motion, was, whether the reverence and respect for the decision of juries, so intimately interwoven with the principles of the British constitution, and hitherto so sacredly observed, should, or should not be eradicated from the minds of the people of England? In conducting the present discussion, he should argue from circumstances as they really

existed. He would appeal to the gentleman on the other side, with respect to the situation in which this country was now placed; and he would ask them, whether they would not accept of the compromise, that the sentiments, numbers and force of the societies, who had been held up as dangerous to the constitution, should remain exactly as they were at present? But there was no situation of things in which those gentlemen were not provided with an answer. If it was urged that the designs of those societies had been checked, they would ask, whether they ought to withdraw the security at the moment they had succeeded in repelling the danger? If the influence of the societies was said to be increased, they would contend that the force, which it had been found necessary to oppose to an inferior danger, became still more indispensable when the danger was increased. If they were called upon in a time of war, they would allege, that was not the proper time to judge of the degree of power to be granted to the executive government; if, during the interval of peace, they would enlarge upon the necessity of guarding against the consequences of an intercourse with the daring republicans of France. There was no situation in which they would not be provided with some argument for suspending this chief bulwark of the rights and liberties of Englishmen. The suspension would be justified, not merely as a guard against the crime of treason, but, according to the new phrase, against any disposition to moral guilt which might be productive of dangers. On such pretences would the suspicion be justified, and the act itself never again restored? He would remind gentlemen of the grounds on which the suspension had been voted: the preamble of the act stated, that—"Whereas a traitorous and detestable conspiracy has been formed for subverting the existing laws and constitution, and for introducing the system of anarchy and confusion which has so fatally prevailed in France," &c.

He now came to facts. Did this traitorous ~~de~~testable conspiracy exist, if, indeed, it had ever existed at all? It would be necessary to prove not only that it once existed, but that the same danger still continued. Were they prepared to go to the length of these assertions? He would not shrink from what he had said on a former occasion, that he considered ministers as the sole fabricators of these plots. What he had then declared from strong surmise and deep suspicion he was now enabled to repeat from the evidence of facts. He had, at his back, the verdicts of repeated juries, who had negatived the existence of any such plot. But the opinion of juries had been lately treated in such a manner, that he was almost afraid to quote their authority; but he would remind a learned gentleman (Sir John Mitford) that for language much less unconstitutional than he had employed, with respect to the verdicts of these juries, a learned serjeant had formerly been committed to prison by the house of commons. That learned gentleman had told them, that the acquittal of a jury did not declare the man innocent, it only exempted him from being tried again upon the same charge. He had always understood, that it was a maxim of the law of England, that every man was presumed to be innocent till he was found guilty. But so far from this being the case, he was now told, that not even the acquittal of a jury established his innocence, or restored him to his former place in society. Much stress was laid upon the decision of a grand jury. He did not rest much upon that, more especially as he understood that some degree of management had been employed in forming that grand jury. Letters were sent round, one of which he now held in his hand, dispensing with the attendance of some who might otherwise have sat on that grand jury; and so far as that went, had the effect of packing them. But he could not certainly regard the authority of any grand jury as of much weight, if after

the prisoner was put upon his trial, by their finding a bill against him, he was still, by the liberal spirit of the law of England, to be considered innocent till he was found guilty by a verdict of his peers. An honorable gentleman (Mr. Windham) had gone even farther than the learned character to whom he had alluded; he had thrown down the gauntlet to his right honorable friend (Mr. Fox).—How far it was prudent or proper in that gentleman so to do, he would not take upon him to determine, especially when he recollected that on a former occasion he had declared that he would not give up the title of his friend till his right honorable friend had first given him a hint for that purpose. The neighbourhood into which the honourable gentleman had lately got, had, perhaps, impaired his memory. He had not waited for the hint; he had now renounced the title. Nor was such a hint to be expected from his right honorable friend by those who knew with what strength of attachment he clung to all those of whom he had been accustomed to think favorably, and how unwilling he was to give up any who had once formed claims upon his friendship. Now, however, that the honorable gentleman had voluntarily disclaimed the connexion, he had no hesitation to declare that he should henceforth meet him on the ground of fair and avowed hostility. That honorable gentleman, next to another person, had been the principal instrument of bringing the country into the calamitous situation in which it was now placed. He trusted that he had abilities to extricate it from the difficulties of that situation. At any rate he knew that he had boldness to wait the responsibility which would ultimately attach to all the authors of the present war. Except, indeed, there was something in the support of the war that corrupted and degraded the human heart, he should have thought that the honorable gentleman would have been the last of all men to apply to persons acquitted by juries of their country, the opprobrious epithet of

acquitted felons. There might have been some ground for this epithet, if those persons had owed their escape to any flaw in the indictment, or to any deficiency of technical forms; it might then have been urged that they were not entitled by the verdict of a jury to a regeneration of character, and were still to be considered in the light in which the honorable gentleman had placed them, as men branded with guilt and outcasts from society. He would not say that every man acquitted was therefore innocent; there could be no rule of that sort without an exception; a criminal might owe his acquittal to a flaw in the indictment or a failure of the evidence. It had been stated the other night that a person might be charged with murder who had only been guilty of house-breaking, and because he was not found guilty upon the first charge, was he therefore to be considered as a pure and honorable character. But did the men who had lately been acquitted stand in that situation? If there was any case in which the verdict of a jury went completely to establish the innocence of the party accused, it ought to be with respect to the charge of high treason. That charge, it was to be recollected, came with the highest authority, and with a degree of influence which it was difficult for any individual to resist. It was to be recollected too, that with respect to the crime of high treason the country itself was both party and judge, since he who conspires against the life of the King, conspires at the same time against the peace of the country.

With respect to the charge of levying war, it was possible that the party accused might escape from the incompetency of the evidence; but with respect to the charge of compassing and imagining the King's death, the intention itself constituted the crime; and if the jury had in their own minds a conviction of the criminal intention, and there was sufficient proof of the overt act, they were bound to find their verdict guilty. Mr. Sheridan said, he would

now put it, whether in the course of the late trials, any thing that could have been brought forward against the prisoners was omitted from any want of time or attention? He had heard, indeed, a gentleman (the Solicitor-General) say, that the jury, if they had known all that he did, would have found their verdict differently. But he conceived that he must have been asleep at the time, otherwise it must be inferred that he had neglected to state to the jury all that he knew, and thereby shewn himself disqualified for the place which he held, a confession which he surely would not wish to make to the gentleman along with whom he sat, far less to those on the other side. He could not mean that any thing farther had since come to his knowledge, since he had himself admitted that the effect of those acquittals went to prevent the parties from being again tried on the same charge. No pains had surely been spared to bring those persons to a conviction, if they had been really guilty. A report of that house was brought forward, containing almost every thing that was afterwards brought out in evidence, and that was followed by the decision of the grand jury. Neither could it be contended, that there was any want of time; some of the persons tried were taken up in May; the six months previous to their trial, were employed in collecting and arranging evidence; a task in which many respectable persons, urged by sense of what they conceived to be their duty to their country, were induced to take an active part. Neither was there any deficiency of legal ability; twelve gentlemen of the greatest professional eminence, whose talents were adequate to any cause, were retained on the side of the crown, at an expense of upwards of eight thousand pounds, independently of the bill of the Solicitor to the Treasury. [Mr. Sheridan here read the list of the names of the counsel for the prosecution—the Attorney-General, the Solicitor-General, Mr. Anstruther, Mr. Serjeant Adair, Mr.

Bearcroft, Messrs. Bower, Law and Garrow, King's counsel; Mr. Wood, Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Perceval.] The Attorney-General, continued he, assures me that he exerted his abilities gratuitously; an example which, I trust, will be imitated, and for which I give him credit, though I cannot approve of his doctrines of high treason; doctrines which, if they were once to be admitted, no man could, in my opinion, be safe; nor yet of the detestable evidence of spies, so much resorted to in conduct of the prosecution. Such an array could only indeed have been encountered by the abilities and eloquence of my honorable friend (Mr. Erskine), who, by his conduct on that occasion, acquired the highest honor, but to whom all professional honor was become superfluous, and therefore he may deem it fortunate, that he was associated with Mr. Gibbs, who deservedly comes in for a share of credit in the transaction. No exertions less vigorous, no abilities less splendid, would have been sufficient to withstand the weight of authority and of evidence with which it was attempted to crush and overwhelm the prisoners. But perhaps the gentlemen engaged in the prosecution will contend that they did not bring a sufficient number of witnesses; that they were willing to spare the trouble of persons engaged in different occupations, and residing in distant parts of the country. How far this is the case, said Mr. Sheridan, will appear from a paper which I shall now read the list of the witnesses summoned in the case of Mr. Joyce, who was never tried. [Here Mr. Sheridan read an abstract of the list; it consisted of 22 persons from the Secretary of State's office, and understrappers; 45 jailors, justices, and constables; 23 people in prison; 28 lawyers and lawyers' clerks; 17 Scotchmen, who never saw Mr. Joyce; 13 printers and booksellers; 49 common informers, &c. amounting in all, to 207 witnesses]—There was one circumstance to be noticed; many of those who were

kept in prison for a considerable time, till they were wanted for that purpose ; there they were cooped up, half witnesses and half principals, till the day of trial ; and yet, to the men who had been placed in this situation, many of whom had lost their business, and been hurt in their character, not the smallest compensation had been given ; he would not say, because they had failed in giving an evidence which might have been favorable to the views of the prosecution ; some of them had been sent back to Sheffield, with three pounds to defray their expenses. With regard to the manner in which the proceedings had been conducted, at least no labor had been spared. The first speech on the trials took up no less a space than nine hours. Had he been in the situation of a juryman, the very circumstance of an Attorney-General taking nine hours to tell him of an overt act of high treason, would have been a reason why he should have given as his opinion, that he could not believe it, and that it could not possibly be true. The whole procedure on the prosecution, was a piece of delicate clock-work, a sort of filigree net, too slight to hold a robust traitor, and yet so contrived as to let all the lesser cases of libel and sedition escape. The very intricacy and labor of the proceeding was, to his mind, the most satisfactory testimony that the case could not be supported on the grounds of substantial evidence and constitutional principles. If he was asked, did there not appear, from these trials, instances of sedition ? He had no hesitation to say, that they exhibited instances of many gross, and scandalous libels. He was ready to admit there were in the societies mischievous men intent on mischievous purposes. There were others actuated by enthusiasm, whom he could not consider in the same light, because it was that sort of enthusiasm which had actuated men of the purest minds. As to the phrases convention, &c., in which they had affected an imitation and approbation of the proceedings of the French,

the worst that could be said of them was, that they were contemptibly foolish.

He had attended the trials, he said, from a principle of duty.—He was of opinion that every man who loved the constitution, and who thought that it was endangered by false alarms, would feel it incumbent on such an occasion to attend trials which he considered as originating from ministerial artifice ; and to watch the conduct of the crown lawyers, and of the judges, in order to avert those calamities from the country, in which, at former times, it had been involved, to prevent that most dreadful of all wars—a war of plots and conspiracies ; wars in which the purest blood had been shed by the most destructive of all weapons, the perjured tongues of spies and informers. That there was no real danger appeared from the declaration of the Chief Justice Eyre, who, in summing up on one of the trials, stated, that it was ostentatious and boasting conspiracy, and that it was much in favor of the accused, that they had neither men, money, nor zeal to effect the purposes with which they were charged. On the first trial, one pike was produced ; that was afterwards withdrawn from mere shame. A formidable instrument was talked of to be employed against the cavalry ; it appeared upon evidence to be a te-totum in a window at Sheffield. There was a camp in a back shop, an arsenal provided with nine muskets, and an exchequer containing nine pounds and one bad shilling ; all to be directed against the whole armed force and established government of Great Britain. Mr. Sheridan said, that he, in the first instance, had shewn the most obstinate incredulity with respect to all the rumors of a plot. He endeavoured to call to mind whether the present ministry had, in any former instance, availed themselves of a similar artifice. He recollected that in the year 1783, at the period when the coalition took place, they represented those who were engaged in that measure as setting up a fourth party in the state,

as wishing to supersede the authority of the King, and to destroy the constitution, and had actually persuaded many well-meaning people at the time to be of that opinion, and to regard the authors of the measure as enemies to their country, whose destruction was necessary for the preservation of the established government. He recollected too, that the very men who had set up the coalition were now in the cabinet, and that the charge brought against them must therefore have been false, and an instance of successful deception. He was more confirmed in his persuasion of the trick when he looked to the conduct of the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) who had adopted the policy of keeping open the door of reform, that he might get himself out by it, and whose system it had uniformly been on that question, to do just as much as might nourish hope, and yet discourage effort. He recollected that the Society of the Friends of the People had been instituted of a hundred persons, of whose characters it would not become him to speak, since he himself had the honor to be one of the number. That society, had at its first formation, been represented as more pernicious than any of the others; they had been held out both in that and in the other house as men, whose existence was incompatible with the safety of the constitution. Their first institution had been followed by a royal proclamation, in order to secure the country from the infection of their principles. In what light had that society been held out on the late trials? That very society had been represented as the saviours of the country, as the standards of political orthodoxy, and it had been represented as the blackest aggravation of the guilt of other societies, that they had not suffered themselves to be guided by them, that they had not implicitly adopted their principles, or concurred in their proceedings. This he could not help regarding as the second instance of successful deception. The proclamation afterwards issued previous to the calling out of the

militia, and the assembling of parliament put into the mouth of His Majesty an expression which was not true, namely, that there existed insurrections in the country. It might be urged, that at that time, there was great appearance of danger, and that it was better to prevent the meditated mischief than to wait for its arrival. In such a case ministers too would have done better to have taken the responsibility to themselves, and applied to parliament for a bill of indemnity. He had on a former occasion taken notice of all the arts which were at that time employed to propagate alarm; of the Duke of Richmond throwing himself into the Tower in the middle of the night; of the mail-coach being retarded, and carrying with it the most dismal reports of the state of the metropolis, so that every person who arrived in a post-chaise expected to find that all London was in a flame. He had then surmised that all this was the effect of mere political artifice; he now found his suspicion confirmed by facts. During the course of the trials, he had heard the evidence of the spies of government, no part of which went to sanction the alarm which had been so industriously propagated. I followed therefore, either that ministers were deceived by their own spies, and had thereby shewed themselves unfit for the situation which they held, or that they had acted upon an alarm, which they did not feel, to answer the infamous purposes of their own ambition, and to delude the people into a wicked and a ruinous war. At the time every body admitted that the measures of ministry were extraordinary, but something they said must come out. Papers notoriously in the pay of ministers, even took upon them to mention the particulars of the plot, and to name the persons concerned. He had then moved for a committee of the house to enquire into the subject: his motion was negatived because ministers knew that no such plot had ever existed. If a government wanted a plot, plots, like other commodities, would be brought to

the market. Had his motion been adopted when it was first proposed, it would have then refuted the libel on the character of the people of England. The right honorable gentleman, in a more advanced stage of the business, had come forward with a motion for a secret committee. It did not become him to say that the members who composed that committee were not highly respectable, they were chosen by ballot, and therefore, no doubt, perfectly independent; but it was well known that every such election by ballot was determined by previous agreement; and he had himself previously read the names of 13 or 14 members who were to be in that committee, and he must say, that it was a circumstance of suspicion that they resorted to this mode of choosing a secret committee, rather than that of naming the members over the table, as had been done on another important occasion. A report was presented to that committee, cut and dry, and by some of them, he would venture to say, adopted without much examination. In speaking of the gentlemen who composed that committee, he felt some degree of delicacy; they were not now all here; they were so much alarmed that they did not consider that house as a place of sufficient security, and had taken refuge in the upper house. A coronet, the reward of their seasonable apprehensions, would, they thought, be most likely to secure the head of the owner from future danger. While the committee were sitting upon this report, which had been in preparation five or six months, two notes were sent, one to his right honorable friend (Mr. Fox) and another to him, informing them that something important was to take place in the house of commons. This was all the intimation which was thought necessary to precede a suspension of the chief bulwark of the rights and liberties of Englishmen. Upon hearing only a moiety of the report from the minister, the suspension of the habeas corpus act was proposed. Seventeen divisions had, on

that occasion, taken place on his side of the house, and he should ever regard the share which he had taken in that measure as the most meritorious part of his parliamentary conduct. In the house of lords the business was not conducted so hastily; their lordships were presented with pikes, with drawings, with male and female screws; their noble natures were not so easily to be roused; it was necessary that they should be presented with some ocular demonstration of the danger:—

*“Segnius irritant animos dimissa per aurem,
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.”*

He was almost ashamed to say, that the suspension of the habeas corpus act was not a matter of slight or trivial consideration. He here quoted the opinion of Sir Edward Coke on the importance of the habeas corpus, which concludes “that without the enjoyment of this privilege we are no longer any thing more than bondsmen. There remains no distinction between the freeman and the slave—the living and the dead.” He then proceeded to quote the more recent opinions of Judge Blackstone, in the following extract from his chapter on the rights of persons. Sect. II.

“Of great importance to the public is the preservation of this personal liberty: for if once it were left in the power of any of the highest magistrates to imprison arbitrarily whomever he or his officers thought proper, (as in France it is daily practised by the crown) there would soon be an end of all other rights and immunities. Some have thought, that unjust attacks, even upon life, or property, at the arbitrary will of the magistrate, are less dangerous to the commonwealth, than such as are made upon the personal liberty of the subject. To bereave a man of life, or by violence to confiscate his estate, without accusation or trial, would be so gross and notorious an act of despotism, as much at once convey the alarm of tyranny throughout the whole kingdom: but confinement of the person, by secretly hurrying him to gaol, where his sufferings are unknown or forgotten, is a less striking, and therefore a more dangerous engine of arbitrary government. And yet sometimes, when the state is in real danger, even this may be a necessary measure. But the happiness of our constitution is, that it is not left to the executive power to determine when the danger of the state is so great, as to render this measure expedient: for it is the

parliament only, or legislative power, that whenever it sees proper, can authorize the crown, by suspending the *Habeas Corpus* act for a short and limited time, to imprison suspected persons without giving any reason for so doing ; as the senate of Rome was wont to have recourse to a dictator, a magistrate of absolute authority, when they judged the republic in any imminent danger. The decree of the senate, which usually preceded the nomination of this magistrate, *dent operam consules, ne quid respublica ætimenti capiat*, was called the *senatus consultum ultimæ necessitatis*. In like manner this experiment ought only to be tried in cases of extreme emergency ; and in these the nation parts with its liberty for a while, in order to preserve it for ever."

If the position of this famous lawyer be true, if a suspension of the habeas corpus can be compared to nothing but a measure which suspends the whole of the constitution, it ought surely only to take place in cases of the most urgent and absolute necessity. He would ask whether the present was a case of such extreme emergency. If any man believed that the people of this country were infected with treasonable principles, and disposed to overturn the government, he might then be justified in holding such an opinion ; but if any man believed that the characteristic feature of the English nation was a sober, settled, and steady attachment to the constitution, it was incumbent on him to call for an immediate repeal of the act suspending the habeas corpus. Such was the opinion which had been confirmed by repeated verdicts of a jury, verdicts which went completely to do away the idea of any conspiracy having ever existed in the country. He, for one, would not wait till ministers should exercise their ingenuity in the fabrication of new plots, or should have time to propagate fresh alarms ; he would call upon them immediately to restore to the people those rights, without which they could neither respect themselves, nor the government under which they lived.

I feel myself, said Mr. Sheridan, as if contending for a melancholy truth with ministers, when I assure them that such is the state of the country, and such is the loyalty of the people, that they are firmly attached to the constitution, and disposed quietly to

enjoy its blessings, without any idea of either attempting the person of His Majesty, or cutting the throats of one another. I shall hear then not of a plot, but of the existence of a propensity to moral guilt, as justifying a continuance of the suspension of the habeas corpus. I will not say that there have been no instances of sedition; but I will affirm even that the evidence of these appears in so questionable a shape as ought to excite your suspicion. It is supported by a system of spies and informers, a system which has been carried to a greater extent under the present administration, than in any former period of the history of the country. I will not say that there is no government in Europe which does not stand in need of the assistance of spies; but I will affirm, that the government which avails itself of such support does not exist for the happiness of the people. It is a system which is calculated to engender suspicion, and to beget hostility; it not only destroys all confidence between man and man, but between the governors and the governed; where it does not find sedition, it creates it. It resembles in its operations the conduct of the father of all spies and informers, the Devil, who introduced himself into Paradise not only to inform his own Pandemonium of the state of that region, but to deceive and betray the inhabitants. The spy, in order to avoid suspicion, is obliged to assume an appearance of zeal and activity; he is the first to disseminate the doctrines of sedition, or to countenance the designs of violence; he deludes the weak by the speciousness of his arguments, and enflames the turbulent by the fury of his zeal. It must have made a man's heart burn, to hear the sort of evidence brought forward by these spies on the late trials. A wretch of the name of Lynam said, that in his capacity of delegate to one of the societies, he had incurred suspicion, had been tried by the other delegates, and honorably acquitted. The counsel for the prosecution, could hear such a declaration with unblushing counte-

nances. By what means had he been acquitted, but by pretences of superior zeal, and more furious exertion. I wish the honorable gentleman, who called the persons who had been tried acquitted felons, had been present when such witnesses were examined against them; I wish he had been present when the chief baron (Macdonald) addressed Mr. Thelwall, not as an acquitted felon, but as having obtained a verdict, which was honorable to his character, and exhorted him in a tone of the utmost gentleness, to employ his talents in future, for purposes useful to his country. The manner in which that address was made, was fit and becoming the character of the judge by whom it was delivered, as well as respectful to the person to whom it was directed. Of whatever indiscretion the persons who had been tried had been guilty, it will not be disputed by those who have attended to their case, that they have feeling hearts, that they are alive to every sense of indignity, and that they must have been deeply wounded by the opprobrious epithet applied to them by the honorable gentleman. I trust this is sufficient to induce him to make the only reparation now in his power, by the speediest recantation of his hasty and ill-judged expression. There was another witness of the name of Taylor, not an acquitted but a convicted felon, who had been tried for a crime, into the moral demerit of which I will not enter, but which had been attended with the aggravation of perjury, but sentenced only to a slight punishment, on account, as was alleged, of some favorable circumstances in his case; though, upon my word, I could find none, except that he had assisted to hang his brother spy (Watts); yet this man was thought a proper character to be brought forward as an evidence into a court of justice, and allowed to hunt after the blood of Englishmen. If ministry had been duped and deluded by their spies, ought they not to admit the deception that had been played upon them? But said Mr. Sheridan I can sup-

pose the case of a haughty and stiff-necked minister, who never mixed in a popular assembly, who had therefore no common feeling with the mass of the people, no knowledge of the mode in which their intercourse is conducted, who was not a month in the ranks in this house before he was raised to the first situation, and though on a footing of equality with any other member, elevated with the idea of fancied superiority; such a minister can have no communication with the people of England, except through the medium of spies and informers; he is unacquainted with the mode in which their sentiments are expressed, and cannot make allowance for the language of toasts and resolutions adopted in an unguarded and convivial hour. Such a minister, if he lose their confidence, he will bribe their hate; if he disgust them by arbitrary measures, he will not leave them till they are completely bound and shackled; above all, he will gratify the vindictive resentment of apostasy, by prosecuting all those who dare to espouse the cause which he has betrayed, and he will not desist from the gratification of his malignant propensities, and the prosecution of his arbitrary schemes, till he has buried in one grave, the peace, the happiness, the glory, and the independence of England. Such a minister must be disqualified to judge of the real state of the country, and must be eternally the dupe of those vile spies, whose interest it is to deceive him as well as to betray others. In what country, or from what quarter of the community, are we to apprehend the effects of those principles of insubordination, with which we have been so often threatened? The characteristic feature of the English nation is entirely different; they testify on every occasion the utmost respect for superiority (I am sorry to use the phrase) wherever the advantages of rank or fortune are exercised by those who enjoy them, with any tolerable decency or regard to the welfare of their dependents. What nobleman or gentleman finds in

his tenants or servants, as long as he treats them with propriety and kindness, a hostile and envious disposition? What merchant or great manufacturer finds in those whom he employs, so long as he treats them well, a sullen and uncomplying temper, instead of a prompt and cheerful obedience? This tendency to insubordination, forms no part of the temper or character of the people; the contrary disposition is even carried to an extreme. If I am asked whether there is any danger in the present moment, I say yes. But it is not a danger of that sort which is to be remedied by suspending the rights, or abridging the privileges of the people. The danger arises from a contempt being produced among the lower orders of all public men and all public principles.

A circumstance occurs to me, which took place during the late trials, where the friends of the people were praised from the Bench. When one of the Sheffield witnesses (Broomhead) was asked why his society declined communicating with the friends of the people; he answered that he would tell them very plainly, that they did not believe them to be honest; that there were several of them members of parliament; that they had some of them been in place; and that they conceived the ins and the outs, however they might vary in their professions, to be actuated by the same motives of interest. I, who might be as little implicated in such a charge as any man, felt rebuked and subdued by the answer. What is it that tends to produce this contempt of public men? The conduct of those who ought to hold out an example of public principle. I heard an honorable gentleman, (Mr. Windham) the other day, and on this subject I will pursue him with professed and unabating hostility, complain of the indifference and languor of the country in the present contest, and call upon them to greater displays of vigour and exertion, while at the same time he affirmed, that no man in the country felt any dis-

tress from the pressure and calamities of war. Will he say this to the starving manufacturers of Norwich? Will he say it to the starving poor of the metropolis, obliged to purchase a loaf at ninepence, and unable to supply themselves with coals at this inclement season, from the enormous price of that necessary article? Will he say it to the landholders, whose property, since the commencement of the war, has been reduced half its value? What can this language of the honorable gentleman mean, except he means to drive the great body of the people to desperation? When I heard the honorable gentleman call upon the country for increased exertions, I concluded that he would have proposed to throw in his salary to the aid of the public fund, and to live contented on his own splendid income. I supposed he would have persuaded his right honorable friend (Mr. Pitt) to relinquish the revenue which he derives from the Cinque Ports, and to live on the 6000*l.* a year attached to his other appointments; that he would have persuaded another honorable gentleman (Mr. Dundas) to give up one of his numerous salaries; and a noble Marquis, in another house, to give up some of the emolument which he derives from the Tellership of the Exchequer, which would this year amount to 15,000*l.* As the noble Marquis, on a former occasion, professed himself ready to abandon part of those emoluments, and take the office at a more moderate salary, he had now an excellent opportunity to prove the sincerity of his declaration. I expected all this, and that they would not have failed to assist their own arguments by the operation of their generosity. The honorable gentleman shakes his head, as if I had said something which I did not mean, or would not stand by. When formerly, in conjunction with him and others, I attacked the corruption of ministers, I thought I was speaking the sentiments of men who were sincere in recommending the doctrine of public economy, and not persons

secretly bargaining for a share of the wages of corruption. Little did I think that the opposition which they then expressed, was only an envious admiration of the honors and emoluments of ministers, and an impatient desire of participation; little did I conceive that the first act of a noble person (Duke of Portland) would have been to arrest from a gallant man a token of honor, which he had merited by his public services; a man, to whom, indeed, that token could add no honor, but who might wish to introduce into his own profession such a badge of distinction. In Ireland, ever since the period of their arrangement, they have experienced the utmost difficulty and embarrassment, from a dispute which has subsisted about patronage, and which has at last been compromised; how far honorably, I will leave to those who are best acquainted with the transaction to determine. In the present war, ministers have been obliged to have recourse to allies both at home and abroad; both have been procured by the same means, bargain and subsidy. Among the members of the present Cabinet, there subsists a sort of Dutch amity, and they hate one another more cordially than even they do us who are in opposition to their measures. The question is, Has the Duke of Portland a majority in the Cabinet? No; Mr. Pitt constrains him by an additional vote. It was curious to observe the changes which had lately taken place; from a Lord Privy Seal, to be First Lord of the Admiralty, and *vice versa*; from President of the Council, to be Lord Lieutenant of Ireland; and from the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, to be Master of the Horse. A noble Earl (Mansfield) came at first into the Cabinet without any emolument; I was at first disposed to give him credit for his disinterestedness; but whether it was conceived by his colleagues to be a foolish thing, or that it might operate as a bad example, he was soon induced to accept the situation of President of the Council, with a large salary. While all Europe

is in a flame, they seem to be engaged at boy's play ; to be scrambling for places and pensions, for ribands and titles, and amusing themselves with puss in the corner of the Cabinet room. When such is a picture of the conduct of public men, I am not surprised at the declaration of the witness from Sheffield, that he gives no man of that description credit for being honest. Willingly, would I throw a veil over such transactions for the sake of the country, were it possible either to conceal their existence, or to extenuate their disgrace. Mr. Sheridan said that he now stated almost all that he had to say : there was nothing, in his mind, which would be more calculated to remove the danger of sedition than to abandon the system of corruption which now prevailed. To reform the conduct of government, and to correct abuses, which would be the surest way to remedy discontent, and render a farther suspension of the habeas corpus unnecessary. He proceeded to state that many of the acts of the societies, which had so much excited alarm, were only imitations of what had been done by the Societies in 1780. If the minister at that time had been disposed to prosecute, he might have made out a much better case of treason than had been brought forward by the present ministers. Was the memorable expression of the illustrious Earl of Chatham forgotten, " that he rejoiced that America had resisted ! " Could none of the members recollect the strong language adopted by Mr. Burke on the same occasion, and the sentiments that had been avowed in the house by the opposers of that war, " that they wept over the fall of Montgomery, and did not exult in the desertion of Arnold." He produced a paper with the inscription, " Lenox, the friend to Equality," which, had the then minister been disposed to prosecute, contained matter more inflammatory than any paper that had been brought forward on the late trials. If approbation of the progress of the enemy, implied by toasts and resolu-

tions; if an unqualified claim of universal representation; if disrespectful expressions, such as—“What care I for the King’s birth-day!”—were to be construed as treasonable matter, all these would be found to apply to the associations in 1780, in a greater degree than to the present societies. Nay, a convention of the same nature with that, which these societies had been charged as having conspired to hold, was then actually held. These men only trod in the same path in which they had seen others go before them, not only without impeachment but without reproach. If, says Mr. Sheridan, we make a boast of equal laws, if these men are to be considered as guilty of high treason, let us have some retrospective hanging, and whatever in that case may happen to me, **His Majesty will at least derive some benefit**, since he will thereby get rid of a majority of his present cabinet. Mr. Sheridan said, that when he recollected that his speaking and writing might have been instrumental in inducing those men to espouse the views which they had adopted, he could not separate his own cause from theirs, and he did not know what other men’s consciences were made of, who could prosecute, and even bring to condign punishment and infamy, persons who had been guilty of no other crime than having taken up the same side of the question of which they themselves had formerly been the advocates and supporters. He then reprobated the arguments drawn from the difference of times, and the necessity of terrible examples, an argument to be found in every body’s mouth, and which he contended to be false and mischievous. It was re-echoed from every quarter, and by every description of persons in office, from the prime minister to the exciseman—“Look to the example of France.” The implication was a libel upon the character of Great Britain. The characters of nations arose not from the difference of soil and climate, but from the invariable

and eternal decrees of providence. Government was the school and seminary of the soul.

He proceeded to press the distinction in the characters and minds of the mass of the inhabitants of different countries, according to their different governments. "I will not, therefore, said Mr. Sheridan, admit the inference or the argument, that because a people, bred under a proud, insolent, and grinding despotism, maddened by the recollection of former injuries, and made savage by the observation of former cruelties; a people, in whose minds no sincere respect for property or law ever could have existed, because property had never been secured to them, and law had never protected them; a people separated and divided into classes by the strongest and harshest lines of distinction, generating envy and smothered malice in the lower ranks; and pride and insolence in the higher: that the actions of such a people at any time, much less in the hour of frenzy and of fury, provoked and goaded by the arms and menaces of the surrounding despots that assailed them, should furnish an inference or ground, on which to estimate the temper, character or feelings, of the temple of Great Britain; of a people, who, though sensible of many abuses which disfigure the constitution, were yet not insensible to its many and invaluable blessings; a people, who revered the laws of their country because those laws shielded and protected all alike; a people, among whom all that was advantageous in private acquisition, all that was honorable in public ambition, was equally open to the efforts, the industry and the abilities of all; among whom progress and rise in society and public estimation, was one ascending slope, as it were, without a break or landing place, among whom no sullen line of demarkation separated and cut off the several orders from each other, but all was one blended tint, from the deepest shade that veiled the meanest occupation of laborious industry, to the brightest hue that

glittered in the luxurious pageantry of title, wealth and power: he would not, therefore, look to the example of France, for between the feelings, the tempers, and social disposition towards each other, much less towards the governments which they obeyed, of nations so differently constituted, and of such different habits, he would assert, that no comparison could be made which reason and philosophy ought not to spurn at with contempt and indignation." If pressed farther for an illustration on this subject, he would ask what answer would those gentlemen give, if a person affectedly or sincerely anxious for the preservation of British liberty, were to say, "Britons, abridge the power of your monarch, restrain the exercise of his just prerogative, withhold all power and resources from his government, or even send him to his electorate from whence your voice exalted him—for mark what has been doing on the continent!—*Look to the example of Kings!!*—Kings, believe me, are the same in nature and temper every where; trust yours no longer:—see how that shameless and perfidious despot of Prussia, that trickster and tyrant, has violated every principle of truth, honour and humanity, in his murderous, though impotent attempt, at plunder and robbery in Poland! He, who had encouraged and even guaranteed to them their constitution:—See him with a scandalous profanation of the resources which he had wrung by fraud from the credulity of Great Britain, trampling on the independence he was pledged to maintain, and seizing for himself the countries he had sworn to protect. Mark the still more sanguinary efforts of the despot of Russia, faithless not to us only and the cause of Europe, as it is called, but craftily outwitting her perjured coadjutor, profiting by his disgrace, and grasping to herself the victim which had been destined to glut their joint rapacity. See her thanking her favorite General Snarrow, and, still more impious, thanking heaven for the opportunity;

thanking him for the most iniquitous act of cruelty the bloody page of history recorded—the murderous scene at Praga, where, not in the heat and fury of action, not in the first impatience of revenge, but after a cold deliberate pause of ten hours, with temperate barbarity, he ordered a considerate, methodical massacre of 10,000 women and children.—These are the actions of monarchs—*Look to the example of Kings!!*” What those gentlemen would reply to such an argument or exhortation I know not. My answer should be, I treat your inference and comparison with the same abhorrence and indignation with which I turn from those who would libel and traduce the character and principles of the people of England, and upon the same grounds and principles. I will not look to the example of the Princes you point out, and justly, perhaps, stigmatize, in order to measure my allegiance and opinion of the King of Great Britain. I am not to be misled by names; I regard not that the four letters are the same which form the title of the Despot of Bradenburgh, and of the first magistrate of this free country. I will not look to the principles or practice of a man born and bred in flattery, falsehood, and faithlessness—of a Prince accustomed to look to fear only for obedience, and to arms only for security; of one used to consider his people as his property, their lives and limbs his traffic; of one instructed to make his will the law, and the law his tool; of one, finally, whose heart must be perverted and corrupted by that which ever did and ever will deprave and corrupt the human heart, the possession of despotic power. I will not borrow from such an example a rule to estimate the principles, acts, or wishes of a monarch, where it must be as palpably his wish as his interest to reign in the hearts of his people; of a Prince, whom a love of liberty alone in the people exalted to his present situation, and who must, therefore, regard and cherish that love of liberty in his subjects, as the real body-guard of his person; of a

King, who, not seated on a solitary eminence of power, sees in the co-existing branches of the legislature his equals—in the law his superior; who, taught by the awful examples of our history, knows he is accountable for the sacred trust reposed in him, and, owing to his title to the people's choice, feels the true security of his throne to be the people's love. Thus would I reply, and thus would I remain—though disclaiming the servile cant of adulation, with sentiments of unabated attachment to the person of our present Monarch, and with unshaken adherence to the principle of hereditary government in this country, while limited, and directed to the objects for which that and all other power on earth is created—the benefit and happiness of the people, who confer the trust.

Mr. Sheridan concluded that, if he were to look to the prodigality, the corruption, the detestable system of spies and informers, the insolence of the higher and the oppression of the lower orders, which had distinguished the old government of France, and which, he contended, had produced all the evils of the present system. He would thence be taught to avoid introducing into this country a system of terror and corruption, and to give back to the people those rights and privileges which riveted their affection and secured their obedience, and placed the order of stability of the government upon their best foundation, the protection and happiness of the subject. The object of his present motion went only to bring back that which ought never to have been taken away. He should, therefore, now move for leave to bring in a bill, to repeal an act, passed in the last session of parliament, empowering His Majesty to secure and detain such persons as shall be suspected of conspiring against his person and government.

After a long debate,

Mr. Sheridan rose, in reply, he said no occasion

to avail himself of the usual indulgence of the house, in replying to the arguments advanced by the other side of the house, for that night they had not brought one forward. They shewed themselves afraid to grapple with the main question; no attempt had been made to prove that a sufficient cause had existed for the original suspension, which he did not think even justified by the fears of Mr. Wilberforce, lest he should be supposed to have become a friend of the liberties of Englishmen. The reason of his troubling the house at that late hour was solemnly to ask Mr. Pitt, what would be the state of the country which he might think would give the act to us again; he wished to know the possible case which would restore to British freemen the most glorious bulwark of their freedom. He wished to know if the suspension was to be renewed when the present act expired; was it again to be hurried through the house in one day? Was it to stand on the old plot, or was a new plot to be made, or was the Habeas Corpus to be again suspended without any plot at all? He thought ministers ought to declare, whether they intended the renewal, or what were the grounds upon which they intended to continue the suspension of the act.

The house divided:—for the motion 41; against it 185.

JANUARY 7.

SUPPLY.—AUGMENTATION OF THE NAVY.

A motion was made by Admiral Gardner for an augmentation in the number of seamen and marines. The service of the navy would this year require a proportion of 85,000 of the former, and 15,000 of the latter. A remarkable discussion took place on this occasion upon the construction of English ships of war. Mr. Robinson asserted their inferiority to the French in the circumstance of quick sailing. Captain Berkeley admitted they were better built, but denied their sailing faster; the French models he acknowledged to be superior to the English; but these had the superiority in workmanship. Admiral Gardner, however, allowed the quick sailing of the French; and ascribed their superior construction to the premiums

given by their government for the best models, which were regularly submitted to the examination and decision of the Academy of Sciences. But the vessels taken from them has lately been of considerable service in the improvement of our own.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he certainly agreed with the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Dundas) who spoke last, that there was hardly any difference of opinion in the committee as to the propriety of supporting our naval superiority, but it was from an apprehension that no substantial good would arise to the country from what had been said to-night, unless ministers were spurred on, that he should trouble the committee on this subject. He was the more of that opinion, when he observed the manner in which the right honorable gentleman conveyed his sentiments to-night. He had said, that one of the reasons for the superiority of the enemy in the construction of their ships, arose from the contempt in which projectors were held in this country; if that was the case, he was afraid the matter would be neglected; for the right honorable gentleman, at the time he admitted the superiority of the enemy in one respect, and the defectiveness of the construction of our ships, conveyed an idea that he thought our ships altogether as good as they need be, and this when he knew it was not the opinion of the best naval officers of this country. He had observed, that if the gallant Admiral were to meet one of the ships of the enemy, he would undertake to blow it out of the water. Mr. Sheridan had no doubt of the courage or the skill of that great naval officer; on the contrary, he concurred heartily in the praise which had been so justly bestowed upon him; but when he talked of blowing the enemy out of the water, there was one thing to be done first, namely, to catch them, which we were not very likely to do, while they could sail faster than us, and which it was now admitted they were able to do. Mr. Sheridan said he was very sorry to see any disposition to treat this matter lightly, and we.

wished we might hear of some measure being taken in consequence of what had passed to-day, although he confessed he had no very flattering hope of any great good being done. It had been said by an honorable member (Captain Berkeley), that single ships of the enemy sailed better than our's, but that they did not sail better in a body. He did not pretend to have much knowledge of sailing, but as a fleet could be formed but by a collection of single ships, he did not see how the distinction could be supported by reasoning.—A great deal had been said as to the character of the first Lord of the Admiralty; some had expressed indignation that any doubt should have been expressed of the adequate abilities of the noble Lord; others had said that he was an amiable character. To the first he would answer, that he cared for the indignation of no man, when he was doing what appeared to him to be his duty to the public, and speaking perhaps the voice of the public. To the second he would say, that it was not an amiable first Lord of the Admiralty we wanted; but it was an attentive, active, and vigilant first Lord of the Admiralty, and if this was the character of the noble Lord, he had been most ungratefully treated by the public, and shamefully deserted by his colleagues, and in that supposition, the best thing the house could do was, to address His Majesty to dismiss from his councils those who had advised to turn out of so important an office, a nobleman so well qualified to fill it, and to place in his stead another, who, whatever his talents may be, must go through an apprenticeship to serve. He agreed with the right honorable gentleman who spoke last in one thing, that nothing was to be got by this war; that was what we all knew, and of which he needed not to have reminded us; but when he told the house the difficulties we had in manning our navy, and the credit he took to government for having suc-

ceeded; he ought also to have reminded the committee of another circumstance, which tended to facilitate our manning the navy—he meant that of our having no privateers. With regard to the vote, Mr. Sheridan said, he was so far from objecting to it on account of its being too large, that he thought it hardly large enough; and, in considering this, we were not to consider, as the right honorable gentleman had done, what force we had in former wars, but what was the strength of the enemy in this? and, upon that view, he was fearful the vote now proposed was too small; however, he should be ready to concur in any vote that might be necessary hereafter, in support of our navy, because he depended entirely on the navy this war. He hinted also, that there might be some improvement in the marines. Having said this, he proceeded to observe, that he had some reason to exult, when he recollected what he had said at the time of his giving certain information to the house, and when he recollected how he had been answered by the right honorable gentleman on the other side. He had made an assertion, with regard to the situation of Halifax last year that was flatly denied by the Secretary of State. It turned out, however, that he (Mr. Sheridan) was right. He had read a paper, which he said was the speech of Lord Dorchester to the Indians of North America: the Secretary of State called it a forgery, but it turned out to be authentic. He had alleged, the other night, that a company of merchants had agreed to invite His Majesty's ministers, but that Lord Chatham was expressly excluded; and the reason alleged for that mark of disrespect was, that he had not taken care to protect the trade and commerce of this country. The Chancellor of the Exchequer seemed to dissent from that assertion.—He wished the right honorable gentleman would inform the committee now, whether the assertion was true or

false? These things he mentioned merely because he challenged enquiry into every thing he said in that house.

Mr. Sheridan said, in answer to a question asked in the course of the conversation, that the mark of dissatisfaction with the conduct of the late first Lord of the Admiralty he alluded to, was, his not being invited to the dinner given by the American merchants to Mr. Jay, the Minister Plenipotentiary from the United States.

The report was ordered to be received on the following day.

JANUARY 15.

HABEAS CORPUS ACT.

The Attorney-General moved that the title of the act of the last session of parliament, which enabled His Majesty to secure such persons as he shall suspect, &c. be read; which being done, he moved, "That leave be given to bring in a bill to continue the provisions of the said act for a time to be limited."

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that in one thing only he could agree with the learned gentleman, whose motion had been just read, namely, "That, to proceed in the discussion of such a subject, in so thin a house, would be improper;" for no person could have imagined that such a measure should have been brought forward at all, much less be debated, when the number of members was barely sufficient to form a house. As the call of the house was so near, he, for his own part, doubted whether it would not be as good a course as any he could take, to suffer this motion to pass, and to reserve opposition to the day of the discussion. There was one thing, however, to be observed from the thinness of the house, and which appeared to him to be a good omen:—it proved, that the house in general did not believe in the existence of any plots or conspiracies, on the foundation of which the Habeas Corpus act was suspended; so little did they think so, that they had

not even the curiosity to come and hear the learned gentleman open the merits of his case. He, therefore, took it for granted, that he should not hear any new plots, or new conspiracies, or new discovery of treasonable practices; for, in the threatened speech of the Attorney-General, there was not one word of fresh information;—it was evident he intended to make out his case out of the good old plot. However, he must say, as nothing new had been said on the subject, he could not expect but that all those who opposed the former bill must be against this motion; and if he did not take the sense of the house upon the question, even in this stage of the business, it was because he did not wish to shew to the public the thinness of the house upon such an occasion.

The house divided; for the motion 71; against it 13.

JANUARY 16.

MILITARY OPERATIONS IN HOLLAND.

Mr. SHERIDAN observed, that though the Secretary of State for the war department was absent, yet, as the Secretary at War was in his place, he wished to ask him a question. He considered that, in the present calamitous situation of affairs, the public had a great right to complain of the want of early and authentic intelligence, with respect to the events passing in Holland. No Gazette had appeared to announce the particulars of what had lately happened in that quarter. This he considered as a very unpardonable neglect with respect to the public, at a period when affairs wore so alarming an aspect, and so particularly distressing to the individuals who had relatives with the army, and were thus left in a state of the most painful anxiety and suspense with respect to their fate.

Mr. Pitt said, that he could scarcely conceive the honorable gentleman to be serious in the remark which he had now brought for-

ward. What interest could he possibly conceive ministers to have in keeping from the public the knowledge of any disaster for a space of twenty-four hours, whatever regret they might feel upon the occasion. The fact, however, was, that a Gazette had been some time in preparation, and was now, he believed, printed off; and, had the honorable gentleman gone home, he would have found the answer to his question in a copy of the Gazette upon his table.

Mr. Sheridan said, that he found it difficult to account how the right honorable gentleman should conceive him to be otherwise than serious in the disastrous situation of affairs, into which the country had been brought by the present—not to use a harsher term—unfortunate administration; a situation which was becoming every day more and more alarming. He was equally at a loss to account what preparation could be necessary in order to lay before the public a simple narrative of facts. Ministers might make light of a delay of twenty-four hours in communicating intelligence; but if they were so negligent of their duty to the public, yet still some consideration was due to the feelings of those individuals, who were kept upon the rack from uncertainty, with respect to the fate of their relatives, and to them a delay of twenty-four hours was a consideration of no small consequence.

PRUSSIAN SUBSIDY.

Mr. Sheridan stated, that as the arrangements were settled at present, he should take the first opportunity to move for the correspondence relative to the Prussian subsidy, as he considered it of great consequence before we entered into new engagements with the Emperor, to ascertain what use had been made of the money already taken from this country in the way of subsidy, and what reliance could be placed on the fidelity of our continental allies.

JANUARY 22.

CARLISLE PETITION FOR PEACE.

Mr. Curwen presented this petition, and Lord Morpeth a protest against it, signed by fourteen hundred persons, on the ground that petitions of this description would only tend to clog the wheels of government.—A debate ensued.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, the only part he should wish to consider of what had fallen from the gentlemen on the other side was, whether, to make use of the phrase of the right honorable gentlemen, it should be the fashion to discountenance petitions from the people. This, he confessed, appeared to him to be the tendency of the speeches of those gentlemen.—The house had been told, that every one knew the ease with which a petition might be framed and signed; it was true that it was in the compass of every man's experience to know with what great facility ministers, aided by influence and corruption, could procure addresses and petitions; but he was yet to learn that men are easily prevailed on to come boldly forward, and oppose the prevailing sentiments of those who had been gained over by ministerial arts. The noble Lord who had opened the business of the protest had conducted himself with great fairness and candour; he was sorry to say his example had not been imitated by the gentleman who followed him. By what that gentleman (Mr. Wallace) had advanced, three new propositions had been started, in which he supposed it probable that ministers would follow him. The first of these new propositions was, that it was improper for constituents to instruct their representatives. This was the language held out by the protestors and the gentlemen who had spoken on that protest; not at all applying the observation to the particular case, but generally to all cases of instruction from constituents. The second proposition was, that it was a disrespect to government

to make any application to parliament, for the alteration of any system of measures pursued by administration; for they conceive it to be clogging the wheels of government. The third was, that public meetings were not proper places to collect the sense of a number of people. This proposition could not be confined to the people of Carlisle; for the honorable gentleman did not mean to say there was any essential difference between them and other men, that should make it more difficult to collect their sentiments, that it was in other places. These propositions being so palpable to the administration, he should not be surprized at seeing them supported. A triumphant appeal had been made by a right honorable gentlemen (Mr. Pitt) to the plain sense of the house, with respect to what had fallen from his right honorable friend (Mr. Fox) as to the difference between the petitions and the protestors. He should appeal to that plain sense, if the protestors had thought, as was contended, that a vigorous prosecution of the war was the only mode of obtaining a firm and permanent peace, why had they not so stated it? Why was not the proposition that the war was irrational, and likely to produce the most fatal consequences to the country, denied to the protestors? With respect to the comparison of the numbers, the honorable gentleman would pardon him if he was not inclined wholly to take for granted whatever was advanced on that subject. That gentlemen had shewn that he was not sufficiently careful to guard against mistakes with regard to the petition; he could not, therefore, expect there should be no suspicion as to his accuracy on the other side. Though that gentleman appeared to think that the petitioners were not in general entitled to respect, yet it was not therefore clear to every one that they were not. The number had been stated to be contemptible; he should recollect that the petition purported only to be signed by freemen; whereas the other was signed by various

descriptions of persons. It was curious to observe, that the protestors should presume to tell those men who were constituents that it was improper for them to instruct their representatives; when they themselves had done a similar thing, though not the constituents of the persons whom they addressed. One thing was evident, that they would not have thought it necessary to have framed this protest, unless they had apprehended that the example of the petitioners would be followed by the country. He had no doubt those apprehensions would be justified, whenever a meeting of the country should be called.

The petition and protest were ordered to lie on the table.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY ON THE ARMY.

Mr. Sheridan said, it was agreed that government should have all possible support from every man in that house towards the increase of the navy; but he was not very sanguine in the mode in which ministers would proceed upon that subject. He thought we ought to have a strong and powerful corps of marines, who might be taught in time to become sailors, and they might again be supplied by landsmen; but he understood, that marines were prohibited, by order, from going aloft, or doing any of the duty of a sailor. Having made these observations, he proceeded to ask the Secretary at War some questions. First, Whether he intended to do something to prevent that inhuman practice, which brought so much disgrace on the service—he meant the practice of crimping? If he did, Mr. Sheridan should leave the matter in the hands of a person to whom it so properly belonged; if not, he must bring something forward on that subject. He then adverted to the dreadful state of the troops now at Plymouth, who were dying by twelve and fourteen a day; and he wished to know whether they intended to be sent to the West In-

dies? if they were, he feared there would be scarcely any of them alive to land there, for they had been kept so many months on board, that they were now entirely unfit for service.

The Secretary at war took notice of all the observations of Mr. Sheridan. He said that the detention of the troops at Plymouth, arose from circumstances, which human prudence had no means of preventing; they were detained by contrary winds, and from the apprehensions that if they sailed, they might meet the enemy with a force not equal to their protection; as to their destination, that was a question which ought not to be answered. He denied their being in a state which Mr. Sheridan had represented, although they might be a good deal afflicted from unavoidable circumstances. With regard to the orders of the admiralty, with respect to marines, he knew but little of it officially, but he believed that nothing had been done in this war, which has not been usual in every war. With regard to crimping, no man detested it more than he did; he viewed it, as every honest man did, with horror and indignation. He had done, and he would continue to do, every thing in his power to suppress totally so detestable a practice.

Mr. Sheridan remarked, that the Secretary at War had made a distinction between things which he ought not, and things which he could not answer. He had declined answering, whether the troops on board the transports were destined for the West Indies; but had afterwards stated, they had been prevented by certain winds from sailing to the place of their destination. On the subject of these troops, he could not help stating that the honorable gentleman discovered a very great deficiency of information; and he should think it incumbent upon him to move for returns of those troops, and an account of their situation, &c. An enquiry into the scandalous, cruel, and criminal neglect by which these men had been detained five or six months on board the transports, in a sickly and languishing state, would, he trusted, not come by itself, but form part of an investigation of the causes which had produced all the disgraces and disasters of the war. The right honorable gentleman had stiled the victory of Lord Howe decisive; upon that supposition ministers indeed had acted, but the event now

proved otherwise. We had soldiers at Plymouth, he asked why we had not sailors? He was told, the troops there had been detained, partly by contrary winds, and partly from the danger of encountering the fleet of the enemy. Why had they not a sufficient convoy to protect them? If the French West India islands, which had been held out as our boasted indemnity in the present war, should fall for the want of timely succour, he would have a right to impute their loss to the deficiency of the navy.

Mr. Sheridan adverting to the difficulty of raising marines, asked why a bounty was not given for encouraging that service. He blamed the remissness of ministers in not sending the troops soon enough abroad the transports, as much as their negligence in afterwards detaining them; the delay was the more remarkable, as in the interim, General Vaughan and Admiral Caldwell had sailed for the West Indies, and arrived in safety. The right honorable gentleman had stated that they had been allowed all the tonnage fixed by regulation, but the difference was considerable between keeping men aboard transports only five or six weeks, and detaining them the same number of months. He understood there were six hundred men now sick on shore, and eight hundred on board, and it was the opinion, that by the time they arrived in the West Indies, all of them would be unfit for service:—so that the best method would be to disembark them, and get new transports for the expedition. If the succours to be afforded to the West Indies, depended entirely on the reinforcement expected from these troops, he must look with a desponding eye to the situation of affairs in that quarter.

The resolutions were read and agreed to.

JANUARY 29.

HABEAS CORPUS ACT.

The third reading being agreed to, the Attorney-General moved that the bill do pass.

Mr. SHERIDAN rose and said, he was extremely sorry he had not been present the preceding evening, when some very strong observations were made by a right honorable friend of his (Mr. Fox) on the subject of the legal doctrines which had been delivered relative to the construction of the statute 25 Edward III. He said he perfectly coincided with his right honorable friend, in the observations he had made, though he would not press his sentiments on the house at that time, but should reserve them for some future opportunity. He declared he had opposed the bill in every stage, because he totally disapproved both of the principle and provisions of it—so much so, that he could not suffer it to pass now without giving it his positive negative.

Ayes 68: noes 4.

MIXTURE OF FLOUR IN HAIR POWDER.

Mr. Robinson gave notice of a motion for a committee of the whole house, to take into consideration the most effectual means for preventing the mixture of flour in hair powder; a mischief, which at the present moment called for the most serious attention of parliament.

Mr. Sheridan said, that several communications had been made to him upon the subject; but one in particular, which he thought it peculiarly incumbent on him to mention now to the house, and that was, the astonishing quantity of flour which was used as a substitute for hair powder, by the soldiers of this country. This, in a moment of apprehended scarcity of corn, deserved the most deliberate and attentive consideration of parliament. He was sorry he had not the calculation about him; but he would assure the house it was of such a magnitude, as to be almost beyond conception, and which, when

they heard, would very greatly surprise them. As the honorable member, however, had mentioned his intention of bringing the subject before the house, he thought it his duty to take the opportunity of saying thus much on the subject, in order that His Majesty's servants might take the earliest opportunity of availing themselves of all the information on the subject, which their situation so well enabled them to do.



FEBRUARY 2.

CITY PETITION ON THE LOAN.

Mr. Alderman Curtis presented a petition of the liverymen of London, setting forth, that the petitioners felt it their duty, at this time, to express to the house their firm attachment to the constitution of this country, as established at the glorious revolution. That the petitioners have seen, with concern, that the measures which have been hitherto exerted for bringing this war to a happy conclusion, have not yet accomplished that desirable end, but they firmly rely on divine providence that the bravery and ardour of our navy and army will be ultimately successful : and therefore, praying that the house will, in their wisdom, adopt such measures as shall effectually defend this country against its enemies, and obtain the blessings of peace, whenever it can be effected consistently with the honor and dignity of the state, and with that permanent security for which alone peace is desirable, as important to the very existence of our trade, commerce, and prosperity.

The question being put, "That this petition be laid on the table,"

Mr. SHERIDAN observed, the worthy alderman called this petition, the petition of the liverymen of London. Now, as the house were likely to have petitions in abundance for a peace, it would be right that those who directed their representatives to present them, should know, when petitions were signed whether they were to be understood in that house, as petitions of war, or of peace. There were many names, he observed, to the present petition; he did not mean to insinuate they were not respectable men; on the contrary, he had no doubt they

were so : but when it was said this was the petition of the Livery of London, it was necessary that neither the house of commons nor the public should be misinformed upon that point. There had already been held a very numerous meeting of the liverymen of the city of London, who had petitioned the house for peace. Did the worthy alderman mean to deny that the sense of the Livery of London, in common hall assembled, had not been decidedly expressed in favor of peace, and that peace as speedily as possible? It was absolutely necessary, therefore, that petitioners should understand the precise terms of their petitions, and above all, the use which their representatives made of them. Many liverymen signed the petition which was agreed upon at the common hall, and which had been already laid upon the table of that house ; was it to be now insinuated that this petition came from a more respectable body of the same livery, and was intended to pass in that house as a sort of counter-petition? He had no doubt but many of the respectable persons who signed this petition, might have been told that this petition was worded in a more temperate and respectful manner than that which had been agreed upon at the Common Hall, and that such a representation of the matter might have induced many who signed it to do so, and yet the intention might be, to use it as a petition for a continuance for war. He was justified in suspecting this to be the case, and in saying so, for he knew the tricks and shuffles by which the public were imposed upon. The whole system upon which the war had been commenced and carried on, was misrepresentation and delusion. It was in this manner some persons had already been induced to sign some petitions, and he had no doubt that others would be tampered with in the same way ; it was the minister's system. Nothing would better illustrate the answer which the minister had advised His Majesty to give to the address of the Court of Common Council of the City of London.

Did not the Common Council understand they were asking for peace as speedily as could be obtained, consistently with the honor and safety of this country? In His Majesty's answer was there to be found one word about peace? On the contrary, did he not declare he considered it as an encouragement to continue the war. This was the system of Ministers. Now, if they really wished for petitions for carrying on a vigorous prosecution of the war, upon their own plan, why did they not come at once boldly forward, and say that such was their intention? Why did not members who presented such petitions avow it candidly to be their intentions to support the minister in his own way, until he shall establish a government of his own forming in France, or until this country was ruined? If that was what they meant, let them come boldly forward and avow it. If this was fairly and honestly explained, they would not get the names of honest men to any petitions so ambiguously worded, as to admit of the possibility of making more than one construction upon them. If this was properly understood by the people, he would venture to say, they would not get the names of twenty men to any petition that asked for any thing but peace, unless they were contractors, pensioners, and jobbers, who derived all their wealth from the bowels of the poor. He should be happy to hear any explanation upon this petition from the worthy alderman who presented it.

Mr. Alderman Curtis replied.

Mr. Sheridan said, he did not mean to make any insinuations against the petitioners, but he was glad that the matter had been in some degree explained, and that this was now to be understood as a counter-petition to that agreed upon at the Common Hall. But the worthy aldermen had thrown out something like an insinuation against the Common Hall, by which he believed they would not abide. They had said, that the proceedings of that

Common Hall did not express the sense of a majority of the Livery of London. Let them try the effect in another Common Hall.

The petition was ordered to lie on the table.

FEBRUARY 5.

PRUSSIAN SUBSIDY.

MR. SHERIDAN said, that upon a former occasion, he and another honorable gentleman had endeavoured to get some information of the services performed by the King of Prussia during the last campaign, in consequence of his engagements with this country. Some returns had lately been laid on the table on that subject, but these contained no information. It appeared that the King of Prussia had received from this country, the enormous sum of twelve hundred thousand pounds, without having rendered it even the smallest service. He thought it therefore necessary, previous to the discussion of the imperial loan, to come to some resolution with respect to this conduct on the part of His Prussian Majesty. It was certainly no argument against granting a loan to the Emperor, that the King of Prussia had violated his faith. But this circumstance ought certainly to enforce on the house the necessity of caution, and induce them to take some step in the present instance, that might operate as a warning, with respect to future transactions of the same sort. His Majesty had stated in his message that he had received from the Emperor, the strongest assurances of a disposition to make the greatest exertions, provided he should be assisted by a loan of four millions from this country. He understood, if he could rely upon the credit of public statements, that in another country, the parliament had been told of the absolute determination of His Majesty to guarantee this loan. This was a language which

he considered as very unbecoming, when addressed to the representatives of the nation, and as highly improper in ministers, who were of course responsible for whatever proceeded from the throne. Before such a determination had been expressed, he should have wished to have had something also like a positive determination from His Imperial Majesty to make the exertions which were to be the conditions of the loan. He should more particularly have wished for such a declaration from the imperial court, which had, at all times, been proverbially distinguished by ill faith. He recollected on this subject a strong expression of a right honorable gentleman (we suppose Mr. Windham), who said, that since the capture of Richard I., the conduct of the court of Vienna had been marked by an uniform series of treachery towards this country. To guard against this treachery, he thought that nothing would be better, than for the house of commons to shew themselves alive to their duty on the present occasion. There were some men who, though insensible to the calls of honor, were yet not callous to the sense of shame. Some men of that description might be found among the ministers of Austria. It might therefore be of importance, by way of warning to them, to come to some resolution expressive of indignation and contempt, with respect to the violation of faith on the part of His Prussian Majesty. Mr. Sheridan here referred to that article of the treaty, in which it was stipulated, that sixty thousand Prussians should co-operate with the British troops, and that a commissioner should be appointed for the purpose of watching over the observance of this article. From the scraps of letters laid upon the table, it appeared that no commissioner had been appointed for this purpose. This, he contended, would not have been the case, except ministers had been aware that the King of Prussia, from the very first, was indisposed to perform his duty. He referred also to the memorial of the Em-

peror, which stated, that the effective co-operation of the Prussians might have been the means of saving Brabant, and, in consequence of preserving Holland. Such were the effects stated by His Imperial Majesty to have resulted from the breach of faith in His Prussian Majesty. In his answer to this memorial, addressed to the circles of the Empire, that monarch shews a degree of apprehension, that he should have even been supposed to have had the smallest disposition to keep faith towards this country, after he had once received its money. He should therefore conclude with moving this resolution—"That it appears to this house, that the King of Prussia received, from the treasury of Great Britain, the sum of 1,200,000*l.* in consequence of the stipulations of the treaty concluded at the Hague, on the 10th of April, 1794; and that it does not appear to this house, that the King of Prussia performed the stipulation of that treaty."

Mr. Pitt replied, and concluded by moving the order of the day.

Mr. Sheridan adverted to Mr. Pitt's having complained of the time at which he had brought forward his motion; from the sort of notice which he had formerly given, the right honorable gentleman might naturally have expected that this was the very day which he would have chosen for that purpose. An honorable baronet (Sir Wm. Pulteney) had stated that he had made up his opinion from extensive materials. What was the situation of the country when ministers refused to give the information to that house, which they had communicated to an individual? They surely had a right to be informed how the King of Prussia had acted much better for the common cause, than if he had kept the terms of the treaty. However problematical the position might appear, there could be no doubt that there were two individuals, the worthy baronet and his Prussian Majesty, who exactly coincided in that sentiment. He again quoted the authority of the

Emperor, who stated that the Prussian troops might have been employed to great advantage in Brabant. He explained his former allusion to the Prussian treaty with regard to the immediate co-operation of the British and Prussian troops, as exactly conformable to the spirit by which that treaty was dictated. The right honorable gentleman had said, that he, by his motion, had pledged himself to vote for the imperial loan. No conclusion could possibly be more unfair. It would have been the most indecent and unparliamentary thing for him to give any opinion on that loan, before he had heard the arguments by which it was supported by the right honorable gentleman, and the security which its stipulations afforded to the country. But from the manner in which the minister had conducted himself that day by resorting to the order of the day, in order to get rid of the resolution which he had moved, and refusing to declare to the country the violation of faith on the part of the King of Prussia, a violation which they were themselves compelled to admit, he pledged himself that this should be the last loan to which he would give his assent.

The question was put on Mr. Pitt's motion ; ayes 128 ; noes 33.

FEBRUARY 6.

MR. GREY'S MOTION FOR PEACE WITH FRANCE.

Mr. Grey moved the following resolutions, " Resolved, that this house considering that in the support which it has given to His Majesty in the prosecution of the present war, it has at no time had any other object, but to restore to these kingdoms the blessings of an equitable peace. That with a view to accomplish this humane and desirable end, every formal difficulty which may stand in the way of a pacific negotiation with the powers with which we are at war, ought, in the first instance, to be removed ; and that without some acknowledgment of the existence of a competent power in France with which His Majesty may negotiate, and conclude a treaty of peace on just and reasonable terms for both parties, there can be no termination of the present war, but in the destruction of one of them.

Considering farther, that the existence of such a competent power

in France has been directly acknowledged by several of the powers of Europe, as well as by the United States of America, with all of whom, during the present war, France has maintained the accustomed relation of peace and amity:

And considering also the existence of such a competent power in France has been, in various instances, virtually admitted even by the Belligerent powers themselves, some of whom have entered into public resolutions to make overtures for peace, is of opinion that the government now existing in France, is competent to entertain and conclude a negociation for peace with Great Britain."

The question was put and negatived without a division.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that he would not have troubled the house, but on account of the misapprehension which had taken place with respect to the motion. He should not now enter into the general question, much less into the conversation which had taken place, respecting places and pensions; he was very happy to hear the disinterested declaration of the honorable and learned gentleman (Mr. East) but when that honorable gentleman talked of the honor and character of the house being involved in such discussion, he surely did not mean to insinuate, that the honor and character of the house rested with placemen and pensioners; and when he expressed his apprehensions, that if the idea was so much bandied about, the public might at last suspect that there was something in it, he was not perhaps aware that the public had already made up their minds on the subject. They had discovered that the calamities and disasters which the country had experienced, were the effects of the misconduct of ministers, and deducible from the corruption of the government. They had discovered, what he could prove to be true, that peace and possession of the places, by the same men who now held them, were incompatible. That this was the case would be manifest from one consideration; the French will not treat with the present ministers; to this it might be said, shall it be endured by a great nation, that its enemies shall dictate to it what ministers it shall have? This, however, was exactly the plan that the house was pursuing with respect to France, and it

was naturally received in that country with as much indignation as it would in this. The house were voting under the influence of delusion ; and he wished that the minister would lay aside all quibbling and prevarication, and give him a plain answer to a plain question, in order to make themselves intelligible to all. Would they, or would they not, make peace to-morrow with the French government of France, provided they could procure fair and honorable terms? This was the point at issue, and he wished to know whether the house would uphold ministers in refusing to negotiate with the present government of France, although terms might be procured consistent with the security of the nation. He firmly believed, that the silent conviction of the house was against such a proposition, but they had been deceived and deluded. The possession of Brabant and Holland appeared to him as affording much stronger arguments for peace than for a continuance of the war. If we were to be reduced to the situation of distress, to which the minister had declared we ought to arrive, before we listened to any proposition for peace ; the question then would be, not how to treat, but how to capitulate. The French nation wanted a peace he believed as much as this country ; nor could he see there was any probability that they would obstinately adhere to the war, if the attempt were made for negotiation, and he must believe it the duty of ministers to make that attempt. The amendment on a former evening had been quoted, but every person had forgotten a very essential part, viz. the amendment which he had the honor to propose to Mr. Pitt's. By negating the proposition on that amendment, the house had pledged themselves not to make peace with the present governors of France. The intentions of the house and those of the first minister, he considered as directly opposite, for he believed that they wished to negotiate, if they could expect security ; whereas the right honorable gen-

tleman was determined, at no rate, to make peace with the present government of France.

The house divided on the previous question. Ayes 190; noes 60.

MARCH 19.

WAYS AND MEANS—MILITIA.

The report of the committee of ways and means was brought up and read. The resolution for the paying and clothing of the militia was agreed to. On reading the resolution, "That provision be made for subaltern officers of the militia in certain cases in time of peace," a debate took place.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that he did not mean now to enter fully into the business; he should wait till he saw the nature of that provision which was proposed to be brought forward. He certainly, however, considered the present measure as a step towards destroying the great constitutional distinction which submitted between the militia in the army. He stated the pay given to officers in the militia to be not in the nature of a remuneration for their services, but as a compensation for the expense of their attendance. He took notice of the argument urged by the honorable gentleman who had spoken last, that the proposed provision would prevent spirited young men of property from taking, in the first instance, the rank of lieutenants; all the captains would be to be selected from the gentlemen of the county of a certain description of property, and those who were placed in that rank would thus be precluded from the benefit of any previous experience or knowledge of the service. He postponed any further remarks, till he had an opportunity to discuss the particular provision intended to be made. He had only one observation to add; it was rather an unfortunate symptom with respect to the dispositions of the nation, that in a war which had so often been represented as calling for the zeal, the spirit,

the exertions and sacrifices of the people in a greater degree than any former contest, it should be found necessary to hold out additional inducements to engage men to enter into a service, where their assistance was only required for the defence of the country.

The resolution was agreed to.

MARCH 24.

MR. FOX'S MOTION FOR A COMMITTEE ON THE
STATE OF THE NATION.

Mr. Fox concluded a long and eloquent speech, by moving, "That this house do resolve itself into a committee of the whole house, to consider the state of the nation." Mr. Pitt replied and moved, "That the house do now adjourn."

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that though he did not imagine that any addition could be made to the arguments which his right honorable friend (Mr. Fox) had urged with so much ability and eloquence, by any exertions of his, yet he thought it necessary to address to the house a few observations on what had just fallen from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He was fully convinced, that the arguments of Mr. Fox had, in no one instance, been answered by the right honorable gentleman, whose talents and understanding were such, as seldom left him without resources on such occasions; he therefore had this additional reason to make him feel satisfied with the impressions which his right honorable friend's animated and brilliant speech had left on his mind; he was fully persuaded, that it was unanswerable. The arguments of Mr. Pitt went the full length of contending, that no calamities which might befall the country, no neglect or misconduct of ministers, however productive of the most mischievous and pernicious consequences, would justify a call upon the house, to inquire into the actual state of the na-

tion, or to investigate the causes of such calamities, and the effects of such misconduct. He had, with great ingenuity and art, passed by and neglected the whole of the strong arguments which had been so forcibly urged to induce the house to agree to a motion of so beneficial a tendency; and not only had he done so, but had perfectly mis-stated and misrepresented the whole of those arguments he had noticed. The question which had been put to the house for their investigation was, whether or not so great a portion of calamity had been suffered by the country during the progress of this unhappy war, as to shew that blame must be attached somewhere; and whether it was not becoming the dignity and character of the house to inquire where that blame lay. The right honorable gentleman, however, had stated, that the motion was brought forward for the purpose of reversing the determination of the house; and that it was too late, because the effect of it would be to make the house retract the whole declarations they had made from the beginning of the session. This was a gross misrepresentation; for the question of war and peace had been carefully kept out of sight during the whole of the speech of his right honorable friend. The house, indeed, had been called upon to inquire whether they chose to pursue the same object by the same means, and whether they would leave the execution of their designs in the same hands in which they had so long been invested. At the conclusion of his speech, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had allowed that misconduct of ministers was a proper object of inquiry, and that if they should be proved to have misconducted themselves, that a motion ought to be made for their removal; he at the time insinuated, that their successors should not be persons who would disgrace the country by their conduct. It was no difficult matter to find men who would not disgrace the country so much as the present administration, even he believed in the lines of opposition. The removal of His

Majesty's ministers undoubtedly was the tendency of his right honorable friend's motion, not, however, in the hasty and precipitate manner proposed by the minister, but after a deliberate inquiry into their conduct, and a serious investigation of the degree of blame which they had incurred by the calamities and disasters which the country had experienced. After the Chancellor of the Exchequer had observed, that those who thought with his right honorable friend as to the conduct of ministers, and the want of vigor manifested in our operations both by land and sea, ought to move for immediate removal; he had said that there was an implied attack on the commanders and officers of the army and navy; nothing could be more unfounded than this assertion, for Mr. Fox had particularly stated, that he imputed the whole to the negligence and folly of administration. The right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had contended that this discussion ought to have been brought forward previous to the vote of supply; he however should wish to know what that gentleman would have said if this had been done. Would he not have said, that it could only proceed from a factious and turbulent spirit to agitate a question of such a nature while the enemy is at the door, and the house had not granted those aids which could alone enable the country to resist the dangers which threatened them? He seemed therefore to think, that after a supply had been granted, all inquiry into the conduct of ministers was at an end; as if a supply for the immediate defence of the country were to be an act of indemnity for all the misconduct and imprudence which had been the cause of such mischievous effects to the country. That such inquiry was necessary, he was fully persuaded; he did not believe there were ten persons, either in or out of the house, who did not think that the war had been scandalously misconducted. The imagination of man could not conceive another country where ministers could retain their situation after a

scene of calamities unparalleled in the annals of Europe, and a continuance of misconduct unexampled in history.

What answers could possibly be given by gentlemen to their constituents, when asked, why after the numerous and heavy burthens which had been laid on the people, the house had not thought proper to institute an inquiry into the conduct of government? It might certainly happen, that the events which had taken place, might be such, as human wisdom and human exertions could not prevent; he however believed, that this would not be found to be the case; yet he saw no other answer that could be given to gentlemens' constituents, if the committee were refused, than that they had not considered the matter. The same answer must be returned, if it was asked, why no enquiry had been made into the transaction with the King of Prussia; as also the conduct with the Empress of Russia, who had fulfilled no article of her treaty; or the reasons why no measures had been taken to enforce her compliance with her agreement. If it should be enquired of them, whether the retreat of the army on the continent, which was by no means dishonorable to the officers who conducted it, was not the effect of the mismanagement of ministers? And they should answer as they must, that they did not think it worth while to enquire into this, and the various other misfortunes which had attended us; would it not degrade the house in the eyes of their constituents? It would be better to suspend the meeting, nay the very existence of the house of commons, if they neglected to exercise one of the chief duties of their situation, that of enquiry into the conduct of administration. Another part of Mr. Fox's speech had been treated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in a very loose manner, as if it were too insignificant and trifling to deserve the smallest attention—he meant the conduct of our ambassadors to the neutral powers. The uniformity of their con-

duct in all the instances which had been mentioned by his honorable friend, though it had not been openly avowed, that they had acted conformably to their instructions, yet tended to show it was a part of the system ; and indeed the right honorable gentleman himself had in some measure allowed it to be a fair inference, when he attempted to prove, that it was not inconsistent with the law of nations. Their moderation to neutral nations had been extolled ; but what was that moderation ? They had undoubtedly acted with temper and decency towards the powerful neutral nations ; but as to the small ones, such as Genoa and Tuscany, they had been bullied with the most outrageous insolence to join the union, which must have infallibly produced their ruin. It had been the boast of ministers, and had been stated in the King's speech as a matter of praise, that this country had kept a strict neutrality at the early periods of the contest with France. In what book of the law of nations could it be found, that when a country was forced into a war, as ministers asserted we had been, it became a crime for other nations to preserve a neutrality, which had been the boast of the country supposed to be forced into the war ? Another mode of shifting the principal question had been adopted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer ; he had dwelt so long on the topic of the state of the sister kingdom, that any person who had not heard his right honorable friend would have supposed, that an enquiry into the state of that country had been the sole object of the motion. Unfortunately, however, it was in the recollection of every gentleman in the house, that full three hours of his friend's speech had elapsed previously to his saying any thing on that part of the subject ; it must also be remembered, that notice had been given of the motion at a period when the ill effects of the misconduct of ministers towards Ireland were not so well known ; therefore the whole of the declaration on that subject fell entirely to the ground. As a collateral foun-

dation for enquiry, this subject was peculiarly proper; for when only this one circumstance remained to complete their climax of folly, that they should contrive to place the Irish in such a situation as to hazard, through their irritation, a separation of the empire, such a circumstance was a great aggravation of the rest of their misconduct. The minister had affected a great deal of delicacy about the independence of Ireland; did he mean to contend that no degree of misconduct, with regard to that country, could authorize an inquiry in this? Whether, however, we considered the persons acting there as acting in no other light than as an ambassador, and that his own misconduct, or the instructions of the minister at home, had produced consequences which were likely to effect a rupture, he conceived that it was proper to consider whether the minister or the ambassador ought to be impeached.

This was the second attempt which had been made during the present administration to deprive Ireland of some of its rights: in the year 1785, the Irish propositions, as they were called, were brought forward, which were an invidious attempt to deprive them of rights, under pretence of giving them some commercial advantages, which were perfectly fallacious. Ireland, though she had suffered the greatest injustice from the government of this country for a very long period, yet when she began to receive a tardy and lingering justice, generously blotted out all remembrance of her injuries; therefore a peculiar nicety ought to be observed in our conduct towards her; notwithstanding which, there never was any transactions marked with stronger features of inhumanity and injustice, wherever the guilt lay, than the conduct observed towards her in the late affair. The two alternatives stated by his right honorable friend, and which had been treated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer as absurd, appeared to him to be completely clear and distinct; and he

thought their policy and prudence had been shown by the strongest arguments.

It had been asked, with some triumph, if we were to give up indemnity and reparation. As to reparation, he conceived that if we had succeeded, there would have been full reparation and ample punishment ; for what more could be expected than the overthrow of our adversaries as a punishment to them, and reparation to us ? It was folly, in order to rouse the people of this country to exertion, to attempt to unite two objects not reconcileable. The mercenary system of indemnity first begun by Great Britain, shewing the hypocrisy of her former declarations of regard only to the order of society, and the interests of religion and morality, had given cause for distrust and want of cordiality among the allies. It was not surprising, after Great Britain had taken the West Indies and other valuable possessions for herself, that Germany and Prussia should take what they could for themselves. It was natural, though not honorable, unless princes had different rules of honor from other persons, for our allies to endeavour to get from us what they could, as a compensation for what we were taking for ourselves. The situation of our allies was a very material consideration, because there was a prospect of our carrying on the war by ourselves ; nothing was stated of the chance of any co-operation with us in the ensuing campaign.

With respect to population, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had said, that 12,000 was a small proportion ; but he chose to forget that this was only in one parish. The waste of men in fact was incalculable ; the returns of losses were fallacious, as containing only a partial account of those who perished. That this war was attended with a waste of men which we were incapable of bearing, facts spoke for themselves, of which any one would be convinced who looked at the things called *men*, who were now enlisted ; the great proportion of boys

and old men shewed that we were nearly exhausted. As to the great increase of commerce, it should be observed that accidental circumstances had given a very unnatural increase to it ; for every capture of ships with exported goods on board, necessarily caused a farther exportation to supply the deficiency. As to the resources of the country, he had never been so sanguine as his right honorable friend ; there was one resource however which would be highly grateful to the country. He did not disapprove of the taxes brought forward this year, upon the whole, considering the state of the country ; perhaps less exceptionable could scarcely be found. The resource he wished to have recourse to, viz. a tax on places and pensions had excited indignation in the minds of the ministers as low and vulgar, and perhaps would have the same effect again. If, as it had been stated, that gentlemen would serve their country without at the same time serving themselves, we certainly had at present a most gentlemanly administration ; and one gentleman (Mr. Secretary Dundas) is three times a greater gentleman than any of them, for he has three places ! Whether upon this topic gentlemen had made up their minds he could not tell, but there was yet time for a more explicit declaration. He wished to know what were the views of administration as to the government of France ; did they speculate on the destruction of the republic and restoration of monarchy ? As for himself, he explicitly declared he neither looked for, nor wished any such thing, having the interests of the country at heart ; he considered the natural consequences of such an attempt to be a lingering perseverance in the war, which would shake the foundation on which the principles and security of our constitution were laid. If we hoped to excite civil discords in France, and depended on the supposed loyalists in that country, the consequences would be a long, bloody, and lingering contest, accumulation of debt, anni-

hilation of commerce, and finally destruction of the constitution. One of the two alternatives would be the consequence in France, either a ferocious and sanguinary republic would be established, which would destroy order in Europe, or the old and inveterate enemy of England—the ancient despotism, would be restored; both of which would be equally fatal to us. If the principles of the present government in France were incompatible with order, the best way, he thought, would be to leave them to themselves, as the most likely method of correcting their errors. The great misfortune of the country was that the minister's pride stood in the way of the interests of the people; for he knew that he must acknowledge the republic, in order to make peace; he was however only delaying the hour of his shame. If the committee were allowed, he had no doubt that every thing his right honorable friend had said would appear to be true, and that the result would be a disposition to peace.

The house divided on the question of adjournment; ayes 210; noes 63.

MARCH 28.

LONDON MILITIA BILL.

This bill being read a third time,

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he thought it his duty to object to the bill as it infringed the chartered rights and military privileges of the city of London. He contrasted the scandalous precipitancy with which the bill was passed last session, with the tardiness of the proceedings since that time. The honorable mover of the bill had last year declared the raising of the two regiments to be absolutely necessary for the protection and safety of the city; and he had urged the measure to be so immediately requisite, that it conveyed to men's minds a considerable de-

gree of alarm for the peace and security of the metropolis. But it now appeared that he viewed the subject in a very different light; from the month of August last, the time in which the appeals were made, three months had elapsed before it was determined whether any amendments should be made to the bill; the committee had been three months more in making their report; and now three months in addition had been lost during the sitting of parliament, and all this time the city had been without either its new or its old militia. It had been boasted last session, that the bill would not affect the poor, as householders rated at fifteen pounds or upwards were alone affected by it; but this laudable circumstance was now done away, as the ward rate was extended to every householder whatever, and even women, the lame and the blind, were affected by it. Nay, so far from favouring the poor, as had been asserted, the amendments seemed to be particularly levelled against the poor; for by one of the clauses, the rich who might be fined in twenty pounds or upwards, might dispute the matter in Westminster Hall; while the poor, who might be fined in sums below that, were to be judged in a more summary way, without the benefit of a trial by jury. He said, there were several such inferior points as these which deserved attention; but the principal subject which he wished to urge was, the preservation of the military rights of the city, and he hoped the house would be cautious how they infringed them.

The City of London has from time immemorial possessed the right of commanding and keeping at home its own militia. In the 17th of Charles II. that monarch confirmed all the charters of the City of London. In doing so, every charter from the earliest time was recited and renewed. The charter begins, "Charles II. by the grace of God, &c." and goes on, "we have seen the charter of William I." it then recites every charter verbatim, be-

ginning each with "we have seen," and concludes with confirming the whole. The charters of Henry I. Henry II. Richard I. King John, and Henry III. all contain these words, "None of the citizens of London shall wage battle," which was nothing else than an exemption from being compelled to go to war. Edward II. being in want of men to reduce the castle of Leed in Kent, applied to the Londoners, who expressed their disposition to march out and serve him, if it were not that doing so was against their charter, and might not only be construed to their prejudice in future, but such an innovation might endanger their whole franchises; whereupon he granted them letters of indemnity, which are recited and confirmed by Charles II. This right is still farther and more explicitly confirmed by the charter of the 1st of Edward III. which contains these words, "And that the said citizens from henceforth shall not be compelled to go or send to war out of the said city." This was also recited and renewed by Charles II. and thus we find that two years posterior to passing the act which the new bill is said to "amend," the sovereignty of the city over its own militia was fully confirmed. About twenty years afterwards indeed, Charles II. issued a writ of *quo warranto*, and seized all the charters of London; but an act of parliament was passed in the second of William and Mary, annulling every thing done at that time, and renewing and confirming the chartered rights of the city; so that the privilege of the citizens in not being compelled to go or send to war out of the said city, is not only acknowledged by the charters of many monarchs; but has also been established by an act of the legislature. If the proceedings in 1695 and in 1745, are examined, it will also be found that the government admitted this right: for they only "recommended" to the corporation to draw out the militia. These facts, he thought, proved that the city always possessed the power of

retaining its own military force at home for its own protection; and he was certain that no man could produce an instance wherein the king had commanded their services by proclamation, as he usually commands the other militia regiments; that is, contrary to the wish, or without consulting the wishes of the citizens or corporation. Some gentlemen, however, had an idea that the act of the 13th and 14th of Charles II. destroyed this privilege, and he believed they built this opinion chiefly on the preamble, which recites, that “within all His Majesty’s realms and dominions, the sole and supreme power, government, and command of the militia, and of all forces by sea and land, is, and ever was, the undoubted right of His Majesty and his royal predecessors; and that parliament cannot and ought not to pretend to the same, nor can levy war against His Majesty, &c.” This he argued, gave the King supreme authority over the London militia, when it was to move out of the city, or was to go into actual action, but he denied its giving the power of calling the militia out of the city, contrary to the wish of the citizens. It was a case exactly analogous to the general militia of the country. The King certainly possessed the supreme command over them, and yet by act of parliament he could not send them out of the kingdom; so with the London militia, the charters of the city, and the act of 2d of William and Mary, confirming those charters, expressly said, that the citizens should not be compelled to go or send to war out of the said city. Indeed the preamble to the act of the 13th of Charles II. was rendered nugatory, so far as it might be supposed to relate to London, by the circumstance of that monarch having confirmed and renewed all the charters of the city, among which the right in question was asserted, two years after the passing of that act, namely, in the 15th year of his reign. Mr. Sheridan said he had no objection to the two regiments being raised for the defence of the city, but he begged

they might not be considered as abolishing the ancient militia. Indeed it would be ridiculous to call them the city militia as they must be composed of mercenary recruits, strangers to the interests of the citizens. He therefore moved an amendment, which would have restored the ancient militia to its former state, if at any time of emergency it should be wanted, without putting the city to any additional expense.

Mr. Lushington thanked the honorable gentleman for the zeal and regard which he shewed for the city of London. He had equal zeal; but he could not see that there was any loss of honor in parting with the old Gothic establishment of trained bands, which, from want of discipline, could never be of use, to an effective body of troops, such as the new regiments would be. The magistrates of the city were not ambitious of military trusts; while they were discharging their duty as magistrates, they knew that the military defence of the city would be better entrusted to military men; they were sensible also that it was a more perfect defence for the city to have a military force that was capable of being sent to meet the danger wherever it might present itself, than to be kept stationary within the precincts of the city. The bill had been very deliberately weighed and considered, not only by the Common Council, but also in the different wards; the city of London had shewn, that they were most zealously attached to the principles of the constitution under which they lived, and they would be happy, he was sure, of marching to any part of the country which might be threatened by the enemy, sensible that London itself could only be safe in the general safety of the whole kingdom; their military associations were truly honorable to their spirit and their patriotism, and surely the honorable gentlemen could not desire that the population of the city of London should not contribute its proportion to the general defence.

Mr. Alderman Newnham contended, that His Majesty had the power of sending the train bands out of London, in cases of invasion and insurrection. Of those trained bands, and of their discipline, he had no very high idea. The new corps would be infinitely more effective; these corps must always be officered by freemen; he had the honor to be appointed an officer of one of them.

Mr. Sheridan, in reply, congratulated the citizens of London on the valuable acquisition of their new representative, who began his career in that house by an attack on their chartered rights. He had said, the corporation consisted of excellent civil magistrates, who were wholly unfit for military

duty ; and yet, the worshipful Lieutenant-Colonel had told the house, that all the field officers were chosen out of the corporation. The honorable gentleman (Mr. Lushington) had observed, the old military privileges of London had been foolishly maintained, as one of the Gothic prejudices of our ancestors. True ; it might be so.—Our ancestors had many such Gothic prejudices. They had a Gothic prejudice against a standing army ; they had a Gothic prejudice against the erection of barracks, they had a Gothic notion of governing the city by the civil power, without the assistance of the military ; and, in short, they had so many Gothic notions about freedom and independence, that they had no doubt their memory was odious to the men of the present day. But he must own himself ashamed and indignant to hear this new city doctrine, which he must suppose to be last and newest of the principles of the city, as it was avowed and promulgated by the newest member, just fresh in his seat, that the object and purpose of any military force could be the internal peace of the city ; for there had been a time when there existed a Gothic notion that this might be preserved by the civil power ; and, in even less Gothic times, a Beckford had proved the fact. Nay, in this new and un-gothic age, the present worthy Chief Magistrate had preserved the peace (in times said to be dangerous) by the civil power alone, for neither old trained bands, nor new militia, existed to assist him. These new anti-gothic notions he dreaded, for while the military Magistrate (Newnham) was preparing to cover Blackheath. he would not now be surprised if the new member (Lushington) in his zeal against Gothic prejudices were to move for the erection of barracks around the Royal Exchange. The whole measure he considered as a juggle between the craft of despotism and the laziness of commercial luxury, assisted by the vanity and corruption of individuals ; and the result was, in fact, the surrender of a great

and proud distinction, which had been preserved with the greatest jealousy for many ages; accompanied with a mean acknowledgment, that the city of London was no longer capable, without military aid, of preserving its own internal peace, much less of disputing the encroachments of power, should such a crisis arrive. Although convinced that this was one of the worst symptoms of the degraded and depraved spirit of the country which he had yet perceived, he denied that the measure was agreeable to all the respectable citizens, as had been asserted by Mr. Lushington, for he knew himself that a very respectable body of men continued firm in their opposition to the whole of the plan; he, however, feared, that a majority of the citizens were duped and deluded into an indifference about it. Believing that his opposition would be ineffectual, he would not press the matter to a division. He had satisfied his own mind in stating his opinion, and a more decided one he never had formed on any subject.

The amendment was withdrawn, and the bill passed.

JUNE 1.

DEBTS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

Mr. Anstruther, Solicitor-General to the Prince of Wales, as Duke of Cornwall, acquainted the house, that the Prince of Wales, while the question relative to his establishment was under the consideration of the house of commons, had thought the proper conduct for him to observe was to avoid expressing any opinion or wish upon the subject; fully sensible that the liberality and wisdom of parliament would make such arrangements as should be best suited to the situation of his affairs, the dignity of the Royal Family, and the interest of the public. But having understood, that it was the desire of many respectable persons, that his wishes and opinions upon the subject should be known, his Royal Highness had authorized him to assure the house, that he is extremely desirous that such regulations may be adopted, as to the wisdom of parliament shall seem most expedient and advisable, for the purpose of establishing order and regularity in the expenditure of his income, and to prevent the incurring of debt in future.—And, at the same time, his Royal Highness had authorized him farther to express his earnest desire, that the

house will appropriate such part of the income, which they may intend to allot to him, to the liquidation of the debts with which he is embarrassed ; as, under all the present circumstances, shall seem to the wisdom and prudence of the house most expedient and advisable ; fully sensible that, however large that appropriation may be, the house will be guided solely by the consideration of what shall appear to them the most conducive to his honor, and the interest of the public. Mr. Pitt, in consequence of this communication, moved, " That it be an instruction to the gentlemen who are appointed to prepare and bring in a bill for enabling His Majesty to grant a yearly sum or sums of money, out of the consolidated fund, towards providing for the establishment of their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales ; that they do make provision in the said bill for establishing a regular and punctual order of payment in the Prince's future expenditure, and for guarding against his incurring debts in future ; and, also, for appropriating a proportion of the Prince's annual income towards the gradual discharge of the incumbrances to which his Royal Highness is now subject." Mr. Bouverie moved an amendment, by inserting after the word *his*, in that part of the message which provides " against his incurring any debts," the words " or any other branch of the Royal Family."

Mr. SHERIDAN said it certainly was not his intention in that stage of the business to enter into any long discussion ; when the proper time came he would speak out plainly, without courting popularity on one side, or fearing displeasure on the other.— On the point that the house, by agreeing to the motion before them, were in no degree pledging themselves for the payment of the Prince's debts, he differed from his right honorable friend (Mr. Fox.) But he differed still more from the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) opposite. The only question that ought to be before them, was simply whether the debts were to be paid or no ? But, by the mode in which it had been brought forward, this direct question might be evaded. The reasoning of his right honorable friend, with regard to an annual income to be allowed to the Prince, might be true, but it could not be with the King's minister ; for, if he required 125,000*l.* as an adequate income for the Prince, certainly he could not mean to pay his debts out of it ; and if, on the other hand, a part was to be paid out of that sum, the house was pledged to pay those debts under the evasion of

making a suitable provision for his Royal Highness. He would rather have preferred addressing the King upon the subject than the mode that had been followed. As to the language that had been used, reprobating this application to parliament as a breach of promise, and other observations of that sort, he would not now give any opinion. The public certainly never would believe that the King's minister proposed an annual income of 125,000*l.* for the Prince, without any reference to the debts; and they ought not to be trifled and quibbled with, by being told at the same time that they were not pledged to pay them; they ought not to be deluded, humbugged, and deceived in that way, but fairly and at once to know whether they were to pay the debts or not. To-night it was not his intention to vote either way—this seemed to surprise some gentlemen opposite; but to those who generally made up their minds upon all questions before they came into the house, it was to be expected they must be astonished that he had not made up his after he was in it. He was against giving any instructions to the committee, relative to the payment of the debts; yet he would give it as his positive opinion, that they ought to be paid immediately, for the dignity of the country, and the situation of the Prince. He ought not to be seen rolling about the streets in his state-coach as an insolvent prodigal; but, while he ought to be relieved from his embarrassments, the public should not be burdened with the pressure of a hair, in affording him that relief. By coming at all to that house to pay his debts, the Prince had been ill advised; and he sincerely believed the King had not an honest minister about him, or else they never would have heard of such an application to parliament. The debts may and ought to be paid. If it is meant to keep monarchy respectable in the eyes of this country, and of the world, a different conduct should have been pursued. The sum of two or three hundred thousand pounds he reckoned trifling, when

compared to the unbecoming situation of an heir apparent to the crown, without independence and, what was worse, without character. In the course of those discussions, gentlemen had applied bold and strong language to that illustrious Prince; but there were other high and illustrious characters, who, in future discussions, must be told as plainly what the public have a right to expect from them, and what their conduct ought to have been upon the present occasion, however ungracious the task may be.

Mr. Pitt said he could not in point of order reply to the honorable gentleman's speech, nor did he mean it. This certainly was a question in which the honorable gentleman felt himself very much interested, though he had told the house he did not intend to vote upon it either way, because he had not made up his mind. He must take the liberty to say, that if the honorable gentleman had given his attendance to the former discussions on the subject, as he ought to have done, in his place, or even had he been earlier in his attendance that night, he would have heard enough to make up his mind upon.

Mr. Sheridan said, it was unnecessary for him to state to the house the reasons which prevented his attendance, and were he to state them, they most probably would be unintelligible to that right honorable gentleman. His reason for giving no vote was, because he did not approve of the motion before the house; it was a measure confused and indirect.—When the positive question, “Whether the debts ought to be paid or not?” was before the house, he would have no hesitation in deciding.

The house divided on the amendment; ayes 52; noes 126.—The house then divided on the original motion; ayes 242; noes 47.

JUNE 5.

DEBTS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

Mr. Pitt moved a resolution for making provision out of the consolidated fund, in the event of the demise of the Prince of Wales, for the liquidation of such debts as should then remain unpaid.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that as he found it impossible for him to vote a shilling, nay, the weight of a

hair, of the public money, for the payment of the Prince's debts, he must make his stand against that proposal ; at the same time, he could not agree with the plans suggested by his honorable friend (Mr. Fox), for the sale of Cornwall, or the forest lands. Those plans he much disapproved of ; and, indeed, it was evident, the honorable gentleman had only proposed them from the embarrassing situation in which the house and the nation were thrown. The discussion of those debts was painful ; but he would meet the question manfully, because the character of the heir apparent was intimately connected with the public fame ; because his honor, his comfort, and his dignity, made part of the nation's wealth, and he was interwoven in the constitution of the country. He had no objection to the sale of the duchy of Cornwall, but he could not agree to have all the money arising from such sale applied to pay the Prince's debts. The Duke of York had a contingent property, and all subsequent Princes would be injured ; but if the duchy was sold, and an equivalent to the Prince's life estate only applied, he felt himself so from objecting, that he thought the sale would be attended with many advantages. The greatest part of the value of the revenues were swallowed up in the collection ; it answered the purposes of jobbing and court influence. The duchy, though nominally of Cornwall, was ridiculously split and dispersed ; we have Cornwall in Coventry, in Lambeth, and in Westminster ; and, as a property, it could not be less beneficial or productive in any other shape or figure. The plan, however, which he should propose would be of a different nature ; but he assured the house, that no consideration of paying his court to any body had influenced him to devise it ; but to that he would more particularly come by and bye. He would not wish to press on the civil list : he had always been an enemy to its being for life ; and had always held, that the real and true control of the purse would be, to vote the

civil list annually ; then would the house constantly consider the exigencies, and give what should be found necessary. The house of commons would then have the means of withholding the salaries of ministers, if they disapproved of their conduct, instead of the vain claim of withholding the supplies which they knew they could not enforce without injuring the public service, and distressing the public creditor. The commissioners to be appointed by the bill, ought to have the power of enquiring into the Prince's right to the revenues of the duchy of Cornwall, during his minority. If his right should appear, and even if the money should be to be refunded by the public, the difference would be, that of the Prince's being solvent or insolvent. In voting 125,000*l.* a year for the Prince's establishment, were not gentlemen conscious that they were voting 25,000*l.* a year for the liquidation of debts, while they professed to be doing no such thing? To vote more than 100,000*l.* a year, was laying down the prodigal principle, that every future Prince of Wales, no matter under what circumstances, was to have an equal income with that now voted. The minister who proposed it was not consistent with himself ; for he had formerly thought 60,000*l.* not only sufficient, but ample. Would any man contend, that the Prince's marriage called for an addition to his income of more than double?—That the Princess of Wales, for whom, in case of the death of the Prince, 50,000*l.* was thought sufficient to maintain an entire establishment, would occasion an increase of expense to an existing establishment of 65,000*l.* a year? He thought the Prince's debts ought to be provided for in the first instance ; but he should oppose taking any thing from the sinking fund, immediately or contingently, for that purpose, till he had taken the sense of the house upon a plan he meant to suggest. The minister would have consulted both the King's honor and his own, if when the marriage of His Royal Highness was proposed,

he had said that he would not bring down a message calling upon the house for money, unless His Majesty would set the example, and be the first to bear a part of the burden. Little delicacy had been observed with respect to the Prince, and as little ought to be observed in representing the truth to His Majesty, which his ministers had neglected to lay before him. Was it honest, was it loyal, to keep lurking in their minds a disapprobation of His Majesty's conduct, without submitting to his consideration what they wished to do? It was the duty of ministers to have done this in the first instance, but as they had not done so, it became the duty of parliament. Their advice intimated to the Prince had produced an effect honorable to his character, and there was no reason to suppose that His Majesty would pay less attention to it. If the worst of jacobins had devised a plan for disgracing the Prince of Wales and dishonoring the crown, it would have been such a plan as ministers had brought forward. Were the expenses incurred by the Prince so very unpardonable? His Majesty possessed many great and good qualities; but on the subject of expense, or of keeping promises with the public, would the Prince suffer by comparison with His Majesty?

Mr. Pitt called to order.

Mr. Sheridan said the right honorable gentleman listened with pleasure to the just praises bestowed upon His Majesty, because he took them all to himself. He did not mean to defraud him of the other part, for when he spoke of His Majesty's expenses and breach of promise with the public, he imputed all the blame to his ministers. On His Majesty's accession the civil list was settled at 800,000*l.* a year, which was then thought so ample that parliament was assured from the throne, that the civil list should not be suffered to run into arrear. Since that assurance, debt of the civil list had been paid to an amount, which at compound interest would make

nearly seven millions. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the early part of his administration, assured the house, that no more debt should be suffered to accrue upon the civil list, and soon after, in violation of his promise, and in violation of the act of parliament, which directed that ministers should not receive their salaries till the other claims upon the civil list were discharged, called upon the house to pay a new debt. When an establishment for the Prince of Wales was first proposed, the Duke of Portland, now one of His Majesty's Ministers, and his then colleagues in office, were of opinion that it ought to be 100,000*l*. His Majesty thought otherwise, and it was settled at 50,000*l*. He had soon after opportunities of seeing the Prince's embarrassments from the narrowness of his income, and the feelings to which those embarrassments gave rise. Although holding no official situation about his Royal Highness, the Prince honored him with his confidence, and often asked his advice, chiefly from the knowledge of his fixed determination to accept of no obligation of any kind whatever. It was not his custom to answer calumnies, many of which he had suffered to pass unnoticed; but he now declared, in the face of the house and of the country, that he never received from the Prince of Wales so much as the present of a horse or of a picture. Lately he had seen His Royal Highness but seldom, from circumstances, which, although it had always been his opinion that a Prince of Wales ought to adopt no party in politics, it was unnecessary to explain; but on that very account, he was the more desirous of doing justice to the Prince, especially, when he saw a disposition to place every part of his conduct in the most odious point of view. Let gentlemen recollect, what was paid for the Prince in 1787. It was 160,000*l*. of this 60,000*l*. was for Carlton House, and 80,000*l*. more was voted to complete the building. A suspicion arose, that this money was not applied to the purpose for which it was voted;

but upon investigation by a committee, it was found to be faithfully applied. Take all the money he had got from the date of his first establishment to the present day, and it would be found not to exceed 75,000*l.* a year, 25,000*l.* a year less than ministers originally thought his establishment ought to be. In 1787, a pledge was given to the house, that no more debts should be contracted. By that pledge, the Prince was bound as much as if he had given it knowingly and voluntarily. To attempt any explanation of it now would be unworthy of his honor, as if he had suffered it to be wrung from him, with a view of afterwards pleading that it was against his better judgment, in order to get rid of it. He then advised the Prince not to make any such promise, because it was not to be expected that he could himself enforce the detail of a system of economy; and although he had men of honor and abilities about him, he was totally unprovided with men of business, adequate to such a task. The Prince said he could not give such a pledge, and agree to take back his establishment. He (Mr. Sheridan) drew up a plan of retrenchment, which was approved of by the Prince, and afterwards by His Majesty: and the Prince told him, that the promise was not to be insisted upon. In the King's message, however, the promise was inserted, by whose advice he knew not. He heard it read with surprise, and being asked next day by the Prince to contradict it in his place, he enquired whether the Prince had seen the message before it was brought down.—Being told that it had been read to him, but that he did not understand it as containing a promise, he declined contradicting it, and told the Prince that he must abide by it, in whatever way it might have been obtained. By the plan then settled, ministers had a check upon the Prince's expenditure, which they never exerted, nor enforced adherence to the plan. In so far ministers, and not the Prince, were to blame. In the expenditure upon Carlton House,

they were still more blameable, for with complete authority they had never interposed to stop the most extravagant and useless waste of money. By the bill, the house was declared a public work, and the money expended upon it to be put out of the power of the Prince's creditors ; the public ought then to pay for it. While ministers never interfered to check expenses, of which they could not pretend ignorance, the Prince had recourse to means for relieving himself from his embarrassments, which ultimately tended to increase them. It was attempted to raise a loan for him in foreign countries, a measure which he thought unconstitutional, and put a stop to ; and after a consultation with Lord Loughborough, all the bonds were burnt, although with a considerable loss to the Prince. After that, another plan of retrenchment was proposed, upon which he had frequent consultations with Lord Thurlow, who gave the Prince fair, open, and manly advice. That noble lord told the Prince, that after the promise he had made, he must not think of applying to parliament ; that he must avoid being of any party in politics, but above all, exposing himself to the suspicion of being influenced in political opinion by his embarrassments ; that the only course he could pursue with honor, was to retire from public life for a time, and appropriate the greater part of his income to the liquidation of his debts. This plan was agreed upon in the autumn of 1792. Why, it might be asked, was it not carried into effect ? About that period his Royal Highness began to receive unsolicited advice from another quarter. He was told by Lord Loughborough, both in words and in writing, that the plan favoured too much of the advice given to M. Egalite, and he could guess from what quarter it came. For his own part, he was then of opinion, that to have avoided meddling in the great political questions which were then coming to be discussed, and to have put his affairs in a train of adjustment, would have better become his high sta-

tion, and tended more to secure public respect to it than the pageantry of state liveries.—[*Mr. Rolle called to order.*]—After some pause, the house called to Mr. Sheridan to go on.—“I am not surprised,” said Mr. Sheridan, “at the honorable gentleman’s calling me to order; I should have been surprised if he had given a reason for it.”—These plans were soon after given up; which he could not enough lament, as by adopting them, his Royal Highness might have been, in point of popularity as in rank, the second man in the kingdom. By the plan now proposed, the Prince has not the grace of suggesting either the retrenchments, or the checks upon his future conduct. His past misconduct was exhibited in the harshest point of view; he was set in a gilded pillory; sent to do public penance in an embroidered sheet. He was left in possession of too much income to exempt him from envy, and too little to exempt him from scorn. To pay the debts something ought to be given by the King. There were debts due to honest tradesmen, to which no exception could be taken, and which ought not to be postponed to a distant period. There were on the establishment gentlemen of honor, whose salaries were fourteen quarters in arrear; and to some of them it must be a great inconvenience not to be paid. The debts ought therefore to be divided into two parts, and those of the descriptions above-mentioned discharged immediately. Carlton House being made the property of the public for ever, the public ought to pay the expense of rebuilding it. This would reduce the debts to 500,000*l.* To pay the interest of this at five per cent. would require 25,000*l.* For this he did not mean to apply to the civil list, which might now be almost considered as identified with the consolidated fund. In the last reign, the sum appropriated to the privy purse was 36,000*l.* a year. In the beginning of the present, it was 48,000*l.* In 1777, when the debts of the civil list were paid, and 100,000*l.* a year added to it, the privy purse was made

60,000*l.* and the Queen received 50,000*l.* for her establishment, all their Majesties' houses and villas were now finished, and they had no expenses to incur in the way of paraphernalia. The first and most natural feeling of a parent would be, to make some sacrifice to retrieve the imprudence of a son. He should therefore expect 10,000*l.* a year from His Majesty's privy purse, and 5,000*l.* a year from the Queen's establishment; for the remaining 10,000*l.* a year, he would look to those places and sinecures, which neither added dignity to the crown, nor were calculated to afford it support. He would just instance the place of Teller of the Exchequer, which produces between 18 and 20,000*l.* a year; and is thus indeed peculiarly circumstanced, and unhappily for this country, that it is the more productive as the burdens of the people increase; that he is rich in proportion as the people are poor; and certainly, from the public spirit of the marquis, he would make any sacrifice in a general arrangement which would be found to tend to public advantage. For the sinking fund he would not take away any gentleman's sinecure place, but appoint a committee as trustees, in whom might be placed the revenues of useful offices, which, after the death of the present holders, and as they fell, should be gradually applied to extinguish the principal. When they should be all paid off, it would be of service to our posterity, who would look back with exultation and gratitude for our arrangement, and with wonder that such places ever existed. This would be the way to make our constitution stable; to prevent the wild system of jacobinism undermining or overturning it. Whilst we are spilling our blood and wasting our treasure, in support of theoretical systems of continental monarchy, this may be a rational resource, and prove that monarchy, or those employed under it, will shew examples of self-denial, and do something for the benefit of the people. This would be to add lustre to the crown; unless, indeed, mi-

nisters may think that it shines with additional lustre in proportion to the gloom that surrounds it, and that a King is magnificent as his subjects become miserable. For his part he felt himself a staunch friend to the British constitution; he surveyed it with a rational affection, but was no friend to its abuses. There was one class who loved our constitution, but did not love its abuses: a second class loved it with all its abuses; and there was a third class—a large interested party, amongst which he placed His Majesty's ministers, who loved it for nothing else but its abuses. But let the house, the best part of our constitution, consider its own honor and character; let all parties, as well those who were gorged with sinecure offices, as those who had none, have a contest who shall be most eager to destroy them. Let us, by such a measure as I call for (said Mr. Sheridan) build the ease and dignity of the Prince on the ruins of idleness and corruption, and not by the toil of the industrious poor, who may think their loaf decreased by the payment of its incumbrances.

Mr. Sheridan concluded by moving an amendment to Mr. Pitt's motion, that after the words "consolidated fund," be added these words, "provided it shall appear to this house, upon due investigation into the subject, that they cannot be defrayed out of His Majesty's civil list, or out of sinecure offices, and useless places paid by the public."

Mr. Bastard recommended to Mr. Sheridan to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Sheridan said, he had no objection to withdraw his amendment, that the sense of the house might be taken on the main question; but he should move it in a direct proposition afterwards.

The house divided on the main question; ayes 148; noes 93.

Mr. Sheridan then, with a short preface, moved, "That a proposition having been made upon a message from the throne, to make a farther provision

for His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, it becomes the house to consider, whether this additional provision may not be made without laying any additional burden on the people, by the reduction of useless and inconvenient places."

Mr. Pitt, without any observations on this motion, moved to adjourn.

Mr. Sheridan said, it would be idle for him to make any comment on the indecency of moving to adjourn, without enquiring whether the people might not be eased. He had done his duty in putting the question fairly to the house; it had been too truly said, that to desire the house to make this provision for the Prince, by a reduction of useless places, would be to cheat themselves; he could not charge ministers with such folly.

The house then divided on the motion to adjourn; ayes 153; noes 29; majority 124.

JUNE 8.

DEBTS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

*Mr. Pitt proposed that 65,000*l.* should, in case of the demise of the Prince of Wales, be charged on the consolidated fund, to discharge such parts of his debts as might then remain unpaid. General Smith observed, that he was convinced the Prince of Wales was fairly, justly, and as legally entitled to the rents, issues, and profits of the duchy of Cornwall, as any other minor would be to the income of his estate in similar circumstances. He understood that commissioners would be appointed under the bill which was then before the house, and armed with authority to enquire into the Prince's debts; he was therefore of opinion that a clause ought to be inserted in that bill, to enable these commissioners to enquire also into the claims of His Royal Highness, and that the sum or sums, great or small, that should be found owing to him, should be placed opposite to his debts.—Mr. Pitt considered these remarks as entirely irrelevant to the question before the house.*

Mr. SHERIDAN thought it was by no means irrelevant to the question before the committee, that question regarded the contingent discharge of the debts of his Royal Highness; and, however gentle-

men might lament that those debts were contracted, they were now called upon for their advice, with respect to the best mode of discharging them. And as he was one of those that had made up his mind upon this subject, that a single shilling of those debts should not fall on the public, he was ready to adopt that mode which would enable his Highness to extricate himself in the most just, and in the most honorable manner. The right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) said that if it even should be found that the Prince was entitled to the revenues of Cornwall, that it would not diminish the regret of gentlemen on the occasion;—certainly it would be a matter of regret, that the Prince had contracted those debts imprudently and improvidently; but would that right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) say, that it would not place the Prince in a very different point of view from that in which he stood at present? If the Prince could say—It is true, I have, through the narrowness of my income, contracted debts to a large amount; I wish of all things to discharge them; but I am happy to have it in my power to discharge them out of my own revenues, without calling on the public for a single shilling—would the right honorable gentleman have the confidence to assert, that under such circumstances the Prince would not stand in a very different light? But the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) says, this money has already gone into the pockets of the public; and if this was the case it would make no difference; it would make a great and material difference; it would satisfy the public if it had gone into their pockets, that they were only repaying the Prince his own. Nay, it would satisfy them to know in what pocket it went, and surely that was the least they had a right to expect. The right honorable gentleman says again, this would call forth a balance betwixt the Prince and the public, that, in all probability, would not be in his favor. What, the expense of his education? Surely not.

As the son of the public, and the offspring of an amiable and illustrious Prince, it was not to be conceived that any such account would be brought against his Royal Highness. The honorable baronet (M. W. Ridley) was apprehensive, that, by bringing this question to issue, it might give birth to litigation betwixt the illustrious father and son, which he, in common with those that heard him, deprecated; he did not see but that might be avoided. Gentlemen had heard of amicable suits in chancery, and surely this might be put on the same issue. He was sorry he did not see the learned gentleman (the Attorney-General) in his place, because high as the legal opinion of that gentleman might be, he did not conceive it quite so conclusive on the subject of the duchy of Cornwall. That learned gentleman had quoted the case of Charles the First; but he ought to have recollected that Prince Henry was the *filius primo, genitus*, and that on the demise of that prince, Charles only held the duchy of Cornwall by grant from the King, his father. That learned gentleman argued on a supposition that the Prince of Wales held by knight service, and in that case that the King was guardian, in chivalry; this he denied; for it was plain that by the act of Charles the Second, that part of the feudal system was abolished. Mr. Sheridan wished that a clause should be introduced in the bill for appointing commissioners to examine into the accounts of the duchy of Cornwall.

Mr. Sheridan wished the house to observe the different opinions that had been delivered by Mr. Pitt and Mr. Anstruther. The first had said that a suit at law might be instituted; the second had asserted that he would not advise his Royal Highness to institute any litigation. This difference of opinion was an additional and a strong reason why the house should come to a decisive vote upon the subject. The bill could not in its present state pass the house. It held up the Prince in the degraded situa-

tion of a man whom the public were warned not to trust. Was it therefore matter of no importance, whether the Prince should continue for 8 or 9 years in such a situation, or whether he should pay his debts to-morrow with his own money? It had been said, would he vote for the income of 125,000*l.* if he had supposed that the Prince had a just claim upon the arrears of the duchy of Cornwall? To this he should reply, that he certainly would not.

Mr. Lambton asserted, that the house ought to look to the credit side of the Prince's account, as well as to the debt side.—Mr. Sumner suggested the possibility of the creditors of the Dukes of York and Clarence making a claim upon the Prince of Wales for the sum for which his Royal Highness was joint security.

Mr. Sheridan said, that this was a material circumstance. The debts of the Dukes of York and Clarence, it had been said, were in a train of liquidation, and therefore were not included in the account of the Prince of Wales's debts. But though they were not included in the account, the house did not mean to extinguish the security which creditors of their Royal Highnesses possessed; and, besides, it ought to be remembered, that the death of either the Duke of York, or of Clarence, was not an improbable event. In that case, the creditors would certainly come on the Prince of Wales.

Mr. Pitt said, that the discussion would come with more propriety in the committee on the bill. The debts of the Dukes of York and Clarence were now put into such a state of liquidation, that their creditors would not be likely to form any demand upon the heir-apparent.

Mr. Sheridan said, that he meant to take an opportunity in another stage of the proceeding, to propose that mode of liquidating the debts which he considered as most consistent with the honor and dignity of the crown, and the interests of the people; and he trusted when he brought forward the proposition, that it would not be attempted to be got rid of by a motion for adjournment at two o'clock in the morning. He meant to move an Address to

His Majesty, to require and implore His Majesty to grant some aid out of the civil list towards liquidating the debts; and also to propose to the house that some provision should be made out of the sinecure places for the same purpose. If the house should negative the address, and refuse to entertain the discussion, he would then not consent to vote either the one sum or the other for the liquidation of the debt.

The house divided; ayes 93; noes 63.

Mr. Anstruther moved, "That it be an instruction to the committee, that they have power to receive a clause for appropriating a certain annual sum out of the revenue of the duchy of Cornwall, towards the liquidation of the debts of his Royal Highness." Mr. Fox observed, that if the Duke of York inherited the estate by succession, he presumed that such an appropriation as was offered ought not to be secured against him.

Mr. Sheridan objected upon the same principle as before. It ought to extend to the Prince's own interest, and no farther; for if extended to the Duke of York, he said, although it was not probable but parliament would make ample provision in lieu of it, yet, as it was optional and dependent, it was extremely objectionable; nor ought the Duke of York to come to parliament for relief on account of the Prince's extravagance. In one point of view it was objectionable to extend it any way without the consent of the Duke of York, the Duke of Clarence, and Prince Edward, since they had all an equal right in it; and, therefore, the best mode would be to obtain their consent, and dispose of the property at once, by which means a sum might be raised that would liquidate the whole, and 12,000*l.* a year might be set aside for the survivors, without any loss but patronage, which the house, he hoped, would consider as an advantage gained. He concluded, therefore, by proposing an amendment—"During such term as His Majesty or his Royal Highness continue to have an interest in the same estate."

The question, with the amendment, were carried without a division. —The bill being subsequently read a second time, it was proposed to go into a committee of the whole house upon it, for which purpose it was moved, "That the Speaker do not leave the chair." Mr. Whitbread opposed the motion.

Mr. Sheridan said, that nothing had fallen from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which had, in the least, tended to alter his opinion, and that he could not give a silent vote on the question of the Speaker's leaving the chair; but must say, that he thought the language used by his honorable friend who opposed it, was extremely just and proper; and that the present bill was in the highest degree degrading and disgraceful to the Prince. He said, that Mr. Pitt had grafted one plan upon another. He had, at the outset, proposed to make the Prince's establishment one hundred thousand a year, and appropriate twenty-five thousand to the payment of the debts; and, according to this, he had formed an establishment for the Prince's household; since which he adopted Mr. Fox's plan of appropriating sixty-five thousand a year to the debts, and letting the Prince live in retirement as a private nobleman; but by this bill he was to be a private nobleman with a Prince's establishment; for, instead of the groom and the footman, the bill talked of his master of the horse and lord of the bedchamber. It was an heterogeneous mass—a variegated tissue, a hodge-podge of absurdity. He declared that he would not accede to any proposition for taking a single shilling out of the pockets of the public until he saw ministers set about the business in good earnest. By this he meant that the house ought not to resort to the people, but to those sinecure places which contributed neither to the support nor dignity of the crown. As these fell in, he should propose to form out of them a fund to discharge the interest, and finally to extinguish the Prince's debts. He still cherished the idea too that the house would still have some assistance from the civil list, and from

the duchy of Cornwall. The arrears of which had accumulated during the minority of his Royal Highness, was a resource, which would go a great way towards the extinction of the incumbrances. The crown-lands ought also, on this emergency, to be called in aid, without any prejudice however to His Majesty; these, he was sure, would be adequate to the purpose; and he trusted that ministers would avail themselves of his suggestion, and suffer the burden to fall where it was likely to be least felt. Having argued on the general grounds, Mr. Sheridan proceeded to the special grounds. It had been stated by an honorable friend of his (Mr. Lambton), that his Royal Highness approved of the restrictions in the bill; but this assertion, he had so qualified in his explanation, that little stress ought to be laid upon it. Was it not, he begged leave to ask, a degradation to put a person out of the reach of the law? For his part, he could not figure to himself any thing so preposterous, as to wish for an act of parliament to put a man into an ignominious situation, so restricted, that he could not keep his word, and do justice to tradesmen. If an heir apparent were so absurd as to solicit a law to fly from his word and bond, he had no hesitation of pronouncing such a man as unfit for reigning over an enlightened nation.

Colonel Fullarton having replied to Mr. Sheridan:

Mr. Sheridan said, he never was a secret counsellor to the Prince of Wales.—He never gave him any advice, in which he did not wish it were possible for the King to stand on one side, and the people of England on the other. He had stated what was true, that Lord Thurlow gave the Prince wise advice, in a manly manner, and that Lord Loughborough counteracted that advice. As to some parts of the speech of the honorable gentleman, some of the sentences he believed nobody under-

stood ; and he believed that somebody had advised him to prepare a speech against what he thought should be said to-night. He had ransacked the English language to find trite sayings, and had so obscured his language with metaphor, and embellished it with coarse daubing, as to render it totally unintelligible to meaner capacities. In answer to dark insinuations, he had only to say, that he had never, during the long period he enjoyed the confidence of his Royal Highness, accepted the slightest favor of his Royal Highness.

A division took place ; for the amendment 157 ; against it 36.

On the clause for changing the annuity of £65,000 upon the consolidated fund, Sir William Young moved that the words " civil list," should be inserted instead of " consolidated fund."

Mr. Sheridan seconded the motion.—He thought the committee would not discharge its duty, if they did not try every means to discharge the debt, before they resorted to additional burdens on their constituents. It may be said that the civil list was inadequate. It should be tried whether the reduction of useless places, paid by that list, would not supply the necessary means.

Mr. Sheridan recommended the committee, that the consolidated fund contained no unappropriated heap ; and that, in fact, there was not a shilling in it from which this annuity could be paid, without imposing fresh burdens upon the people. A saving to that amount might be made in the civil list ; at all events the experiment should be tried.

Mr. Wilberforce supported the clause, and said, that the honorable gentleman should first have shewn how these savings could be made from the civil list.

Mr. Sheridan replied, that, though the civil list had been thought incapable of retrenchment, it was certain, even when that opinion prevailed, that if a pinching exigency should come, retrenchment must

be tried; and he thought it should be attempted, when such a sum as the present was demanded.— He would pay the Prince's debts, but wished the money to come out of the civil list.

The committee divided; for the amendment 16; against it 149.— The question was then put upon the clause, as it originally stood, which was carried without a division.

JUNE 15.

DEBTS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

General Smith moved a clause, empowering the Commissioners to enquire into the amount of the revenue arising from the duchy of Cornwall during the minority of the Prince, with the view of its being applicable to the liquidation of his debts.

MR. SHERIDAN said, that from the mode of proceeding adopted by the house, the Prince's character was implicated in the question, insomuch as it would decide whether or not he could pay his debts, and assume the splendor befitting his station in any reasonable time. His income he received originally, burdened with pensions to the amount of 8000*l.* a year, and deducting rent and taxes, the whole sum left him by the bill, even including the sum just voted for the privy purse of the Princess, would not exceed 40,000*l.* a year. To this sum he was to be restricted for ten years, obliged to dismiss gentlemen from his service, who, perhaps, had formed their dependance upon him, and unable to appropriate any thing to benevolence or charity. The house were making themselves trustees for his whole property, and in that character they were bound in honor to enquire what money was due to him, as well as what debts he owed. As to the expenses of his Royal Highness's education, he said, the right honorable gentleman had exaggerated them, and had forgotten that the statements lay upon the table, delivered at a former period. According to them, from the 5th of January, 1770, to the 5th of

January, 1777, the sum total amounted to 42,242*l.*; and, as to the pretence attempted to be established, that nearly that sum must have been alone expended in the education and establishment of his Royal Highness, exclusive of his royal brother, he could not see how any solid and rational argument could be substantiated upon it. He was at a loss to know why the Bishop of Osnaburg should come in like a rider upon the Prince's learning, to pick up the dry crumbs of education. Unless the Prince, therefore, swallowed three times as much Greek as his brother, and took up a larger portion of dancing, he could not tell why the half of that sum should not be attributed to the education of the Duke of York. Reckoning, however, 25,000*l.* for the Prince out of it, the receipts of the revenue of the duchy of Cornwall, during the same interval, amounted to 95,150*l.* so that the expenditure for the maintenance and education of his Royal Highness did not form a third part of his income. The 60,000*l.*, voted in 1783, was not voted for the Prince, but generally in aid of the civil list, and the Prince did not receive more than 20,000*l.* of it. As to the other 160,000*l.* which parliament granted in 1787, he had to repeat, what he before stated, that 80,000*l.* of it was due for the rebuilding and furniture of Carlton House, which really was unfit for habitation. Since Carlton House, therefore, was to be considered as the property of the nation, or rather as the property of His Majesty, and disposable with all the furniture, perhaps, by him to-morrow, he blamed the right honorable gentleman for including those sums in his account of the expenditure. On a fair calculation, it would be found that the Prince had not received more than 100,000*l.* over and above his regular income; and the revenue of the duchy of Cornwall, with interest, during his minority, would amount to 500,000*l.* He did not see how the house could appoint commissioners to pay his debts, without looking into so large a sum due to him.

Mr. Sheridan afterwards observed, that it interested the character of the Prince, not to lay any additional burden on the public. If the arrears were fairly laid at the door of the civil list, he would answer the public should never be troubled on this subject.

The house divided on General Smith's motion; ayes 40; noes 97.

JUNE 17.

AID TO MERCHANTS TRADING IN GRENADA AND ST. VINCENT'S.

On the order of the day that the bill allowing a million and half, to be raised on exchequer bills, for the purpose of aiding the credit of merchants trading in Grenada and St. Vincent's, should be read a second time, Mr. Fox observed, that the force sent to the West Indies had been inadequate; and, upon an investigation of facts, it would turn out that such was the opinion of the commanders in chief and the ministers:—and that if the house should not be now disposed to go into an enquiry, he begged, at least, that the object might not be considered as abandoned; and, he hoped, there would be no obstacle to such an enquiry at a future period, on pretext of the time at which it was brought forward.—Mr. Dundas replied.

MR. SHERIDAN said, that in one point only he agreed with the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Dundas), that if a motion for enquiry was made, it would not be likely to succeed; and on this ground he supposed, that the right honorable gentleman was so much inclined to deal in assertions. He remarked of the right honorable gentleman, that whenever he stood upon weak ground, where he was conscious of his incapacity to make a defence, that instead of waiting for an attack, he immediately sallied forth to claim merit, and challenge applause. Such was his conduct with respect to the system pursued by administration in the West Indies; which, among all the absurd and assailable measures adopted by them in the prosecution of the war, was the most weak, and the most vulnerable. He asked, whether Sir Charles Grey, so far from receiving a rein-

forcement of twenty, ten, or five thousand men, had received even one man to retain possession of the islands which he had conquered? Instead of twenty, not above ten thousand men had been sent; not one of whom arrived in proper time. As to the assertion, that Guadaloupe would not have been lost, had it not been for the death of General Dundas, he knew very little about it—not more than the right honorable gentleman by whom it was made. If the unfortunate consequences of the neglect shown with respect to the West Indies, should extend to our own possessions in that quarter, the crime and the blame would rest entirely with ministers. Mr. Sheridan then adverted to what he had said, on a former occasion, of the sickly condition of the troops detained on board the transports; which had then been controverted by ministers; though they afterwards had recourse to the expedient which he advised—of relanding several of the regiments, as unfit for the service for which they were destined.

The bill was read a second time, and ordered to be committed on the day following.

DEBTS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

The order of the day for the third reading of a bill, granting an establishment to the Prince of Wales, was read.

Mr. Sheridan said, he must oppose the bill both in its principle and its provisions, because it went to burden the public with taxes to the amount of 65,000*l.*; this he had said, again and again, was the effect of it, which he must now repeat. It was, therefore, objectionable to him, because he thought that the whole charge ought to fall on pensions, sinecures, and all the trappings of the court, and also the arrears of the duchy of Cornwall. A learned gentleman had said, that nothing would be more expensive and absurd than the sale of the crown lands at this time, because the crown lands

were in a state of improvement. He should be glad to know what the improvement was which that gentleman expected. He doubted very much whether the commissioners, who examined the state of the crown lands, would take the produce of the improvement as the reward of their labor. But if there was any improvement to be made, there could be no doubt but that would have its effect on the price which would be given. As to the question on the arrears of the duchy, he agreed with the honorable general entirely ;—that they ought to be accounted for to the Prince, and that this question could not be set at rest by this bill. It was an unfortunate circumstance for His Royal Highness that his advisers thought so lightly of his claim. But, if he had his former advisers, who were honorable and learned gentlemen, he had no doubt but the claim would be made, for they were the friends of the Prince ;—not less his friends, for being also the friends of the public. He then desired that the part of His Majesty's message to the house, relative to this business, which recommends that they would settle an establishment on the Prince, be read : which being done, he proceeded to shew that this measure was not an establishment for the Prince suitable to his rank and dignity. He therefore, for one, should not consider this subject as closed, but open for discussion at any future time ; and he thought that sinecure places and pensions ought to be applied to the discharge of the incumbrances. He thought also that a sum of money ought to be raised immediately to the discharge of the debts ; for by the present plan the Prince's name would appear indorsed on all his bills, for eight or nine years together. This was improper with regard to the creditors also, whom some gentlemen put together as a gang of robbers in a lump, but many of whom he believed to have fair and just claims upon his Royal Highness ;—these creditors were ill-treated by this measure ; they would lose four or five per

cent. for discount of the debentures after their claims should be allowed ; so that after all, the tradesmen would not have the whole of their demands settled. There was another point to which he could not help alluding. Gentlemen had blamed the Prince for making the establishment which he did, before he knew what Parliament would think fit to grant him. Now he had reason to believe that his Royal Highness was encouraged in that idea by those in whom he thought he might trust ; for he believed that the Prince was assured his income should be at least 100,000*l.* a year, clear of all deduction ; instead of which, all the addition to his income was to go in payment of his debts—and that too a burden on the public. Thinking, therefore, that the public and the Prince were equally ill-treated, Mr. Sheridan found himself bound to oppose this bill altogether.

Mr. Anstruther begged leave to say a few words as to what had fallen from Mr. Sheridan, respecting himself. The honorable gentleman he said, had seemed to accuse him of having given an opinion as the law officer of the Prince of Wales, against the claim of the Prince ;—this he denied to be the case. He had given no opinion upon the point. He had only said in the house, that he had not heard any thing which could induce him to advise the Prince to risque this claim. That Royal Personage had never asked him for his opinion on that head—whenever he did so, be his opinion good or bad, he would give it to the best of his knowledge and judgment. The honorable gentleman had said, that those who were the law officers of the Prince before him, had given their decided opinion in favor of the Prince's claim. It might be so, but he had never heard it before. It had been asked why he, as the law officer, had not advised the Prince to assert this claim. He had said before, his opinion had never been asked by His Royal Highness ; but why did not the learned gentleman who had been mentioned to have given their opinion, as it was so favorable to the claim, why did not they advise the Prince to assert it ? It was certainly as much their duty as it was his, especially as they had made up their minds decidedly in favor of it, and he had not.

Mr. Sheridan was much surprised at what had just been said by the learned gentleman as to his not having given an opinion on the subject of this claim. He said, as far as he was competent to judge of what was an opinion, he thought the

learned gentleman had entered very much at large into the subject—had boasted that he had opportunities of greater and better information than most other members had;—that he had very much at large entered into the construction both of the letter and spirit of the statute of Edward III.—of the nature of the different feudal tenures by which it might be supposed to be guided and affected—of the case of Charles I. and the act of Charles II.; and after descanting so much at large on the whole field of legal argument, applicable to the subject, the learned gentleman had said, that from all he had seen and read on the subject, “he could not see any thing that induced him to advise the Prince to risque this claim.” If this was not giving an opinion, Mr. Sheridan said, he was at a loss to know what was meant by an opinion; and if it was an opinion, as he contended it was, he felt but little hesitation in saying, that to his mind it appeared to be an opinion bearing pretty strongly against the claim of his Royal Highness.

The honorable gentleman had asked, “why the learned gentleman who had preceded him in office had not advised his Royal Highness to assert his claim?” The answer was extremely obvious. It would have been looked upon as an officious and a very invidious step in them to have given any such advice at that time, situated as the Prince then was. It was very different now—that house were now acting as trustees for his Royal Highness, as well as for the public; and it behoved them to look seriously to what was due to him, as much as to what was due from him. He asserted, that these arrears were, in his opinion, the Prince’s just right;—as such, they ought to be paid to him. If they had been paid to him before, he would venture to say, ministers would have had no occasion to come now to parliament for the payment of his debts. He was happy in being able to state to the house, that both the learned gentlemen he had alluded to,

were decidedly of opinion that these arrears of the duchy of Cornwall were due to the Prince; and, he had no doubt, if they were now in the offices they formerly held under the Prince, they would advise his Royal Highness immediately to assert his claim.

The house divided; for the third reading 54; against it 10.

OCTOBER 29.

ADDRESS ON THE KING'S SPEECH AT THE
OPENING OF THE SESSION.

His Majesty opened the session with the following speech: "My lords and gentlemen, it is a great satisfaction to me to reflect that, notwithstanding the many events unfavorable to the common cause, the prospect resulting from the general situation of affairs has, in many important respects, been materially improved in the course of the present year. In Italy the threatened invasion of the French has been prevented; and they have been driven back from a considerable part of the line of coast which they had occupied: there is also reason to hope that the recent operations of the Austrian armies have checked the progress which they have made on the side of Germany, and frustrated the offensive projects which they were pursuing in that quarter. The successes which have attended their military operations in other parts of the campaign, and the advantages which they have derived from the conclusion of separate treaties with some of the powers who were engaged in the war, are far from compensating the evils which they experience from its continuance. The destruction of their commerce, the diminution of their maritime power, and the unparalleled embarrassment and distress of their internal situation, have produced the impression which was naturally to be expected; and a general sense appears to prevail throughout France, that the only relief from the increasing pressure of these difficulties must arise from the restoration of peace, and the establishment of some settled system of government. The distraction and anarchy which have so long prevailed in that country, have led to a crisis, of which it is as yet impossible to foresee the issue; but which must, in all human probability, produce consequences highly important to the interests of Europe. Should this crisis terminate in any order of things compatible with the tranquillity of other countries, and affording a reasonable expectation of security and permanence in any treaty which might be concluded, the appearance of a disposition to negotiate for general peace on just and suitable terms will not fail to be met, on my part, with an earnest desire to give it the fullest and speediest effect. But I am persuaded you will agree with me, that

nothing is so likely to ensure and accelerate this desirable end, as to shew that we are prepared for either alternative, and are determined to prosecute the war with the utmost energy and vigor, until we have the means of concluding, in conjunction with our allies, such a peace as the justice of our cause and the situation of the enemy may entitle us to expect. With this view I am continuing to make the greatest exertions for maintaining and improving our naval superiority, and for carrying on active and vigorous operations in the West Indies, in order to secure and extend the advantages which we have gained in that quarter, and which are so nearly connected with our commercial resources and maritime strength. I rely with full confidence on the continuance of your firm and zealous support—on the uniform bravery of my fleets and armies—and on the fortitude, perseverance, and public spirit of all ranks of my people. The acts of hostility committed by the United Provinces, under the influence and control of France, have obliged me to treat them as in a state of war with this country. The fleet which I have employed in the North Seas has received the most cordial and active assistance from the naval force furnished by the Empress of Russia, and has been enabled effectually to check the operations of the enemy in that quarter. I have concluded engagements of defensive alliance with the two imperial courts; and the ratifications of the treaty of commerce with the United States of America, which I announced to you last year, have now been exchanged. I have directed copies of these treaties to be laid before you.

Gentlemen of the house of commons, it is matter of deep concern to me, that the exigencies of the public service will require further additions to the heavy burdens which have been unavoidably imposed on my people. I trust that their pressure will, in some degree, be alleviated by the flourishing state of our commerce and manufactures, and that our expenses, though necessarily great in their amount, will under the actual circumstances of the war, admit of considerable diminution in comparison with those of the present year.

My lords and gentlemen, I have observed for some time past, with the greatest anxiety, the very high price of grain, and that anxiety is increased by the apprehension that the produce of the wheat harvest in the present year may not have been such as effectually to relieve my people from the difficulties with which they have had to contend. The spirit of order and submission to the laws which, with very few exceptions, has manifested itself under this severe pressure, will, I am sure, be felt by you as an additional incentive to apply yourselves with the utmost diligence to the considerations of such measures as may tend to alleviate the present distress, and to prevent, as far as possible, the renewal of similar embarrassments in future. Nothing has been omitted on my part that appeared likely to contribute to this end; and you may be assured of my hearty concurrence in whatever regulations the wisdom of parliament may adopt, on a subject so peculiarly interesting to my people, whose welfare will ever be the object nearest my heart.

The Earl of Dalkeith moved the usual address, and was seconded by the Hon. Robert Stewart, now Lord Castlereagh.

MR. SHERIDAN rose, and began by stating that it was not his intention to have risen so early to deliver his opinion ; but observing that not a single gentleman evinced a wish to speak, he could not prevail upon himself to remain silent. Indeed he was not surprised at the dumb astonishment with which the speech had been heard : for if ever there was a speech calculated to excite astonishment and surprise, it was the present. He would venture to say, if any person could have previously known the speech, and had written to any part of England or Scotland, they would not have found a single man who would not have been surprised at the first noun substantive in the speech being satisfaction, or at that substantive being used in any other part of the speech. It was said to be the mark of a resigned and religious temper, to be easily satisfied. If that were true, there never were ministers of more meek and primitive piety than the present. For what they had been satisfied by he knew not. Had the mover or seconder of the address told the house ? Our situation had, it was asserted, experienced considerable improvement since last year.—The first improvement was on the side of Italy ; but it was not remembered, that at the period alluded to, the Republicans had not penetrated into Italy ! The second consisted in a report of a check which the French had experienced on the other side of the Rhine ! He wished it might prove true ; but, at present, he believed it rested on no better authority than a French newspaper ! The army of the Rhine, however, had not last year crossed the Rhine ; and now they were only prevented from advancing to the Danube, and obliged to limit their progress to the German side of the Rhine, where they were likely to spend the winter. Had any improvement occurred with respect to the situation of this coun-

try with Holland? The Dutch were in perfect alliance with France; and England was at war with Holland. Last year Prussia had been an ally of Great Britain; yet, though his Prussian Majesty had departed from the alliance, the rest of the allies would, it was maintained, prove steady to the cause. What had been the fact? Spain had been lost to the coalition. Was this an improvement in the situation of the country? Last year several islands had been conquered in the West Indies. This year the situation of the country had been improved by the loss of two, and by the imminent danger in which the rest were involved. Had the situation of the country at home been improved? Last year the minister had treated with scorn the idea of a scarcity of grain; yet now, the people were informed in the speech from the throne, that there was a prospect of another famine, not less severe than the last; and this was to be considered as an improvement. He was really surprised how ministers could have the front to put such words into the mouth of His Majesty; and that they could suffer the King when he passed through his starving and oppressed, and sorry was he to hear, irritated and clamorous people, to come down to the house and express his satisfaction.

If the prospect of peace was near, some compensation would be made for those evils; but gentlemen still clung, he said, to their old system. By a reference to the speech of the year before last, he found His Majesty had said "peace could alone be obtained by a successful termination of the contest." Was the country now, he would ask, in the course of a successful termination of the contest, or since that period, have we met with any thing but disgrace and defeat? How different from what is laid down in that speech, is the argument of the gentleman who seconded the address. He says, "the more the French conquer, the more they increase their internal distress, and from that distress are we

to look forward to a better order of things." In the speech of last session, His Majesty held out some hopes of peace, which he was afraid could not be drawn from the present; he there says, "that it is impossible to contemplate the present state of affairs without indulging a hope that they must produce a government capable of maintaining the accustomed relations of peace and amity with other powers." In the present speech His Majesty only states, that "the distraction and anarchy which have so long prevailed in that country, have led to a crisis, of which it is impossible as yet to foresee the issue." A very just cause of satisfaction truly;—that is as much as to say, it is impossible to see any benefit that may arise from this crisis; but it is to produce consequences that will be important to the interests of Europe. When these consequences are to arrive, and what they are to be, we know not; but they are in spirit a little stolen from Partridge's almanack; the predictions in which are, "that the next year will produce most important events, of which all those who are then alive will be witnesses." In this speech then there is not any well-founded ground for the hope of peace; and we are now exactly in the same state as when His Majesty delivered his most gracious speech of last year, *minus* the hope of peace. "If," said Mr. Sheridan, "I were to judge of His Majesty's speech according to the letter of our constitution, as coming from the King himself, and not in fact, and according to the spirit of that constitution, as the speech of the minister, I think it contains a rational source of satisfaction to His Majesty individually. As Elector of Hanover, he certainly did right to make peace in that capacity; and if he could have the same feelings and opinions about Great Britain, and consult the same advisers, it would afford matter of joy to every body. I have often heard," said Mr. Sheridan, "of a considerable degree of jealousy being entertained by the people of Great Britain, when

the King has brought into this country his Hanoverian troops ; I would therefore humbly propose, that His Majesty may keep his troops at home, but instead thereof, import some of his Hanoverian counsellors, and send his British ministers to Hanover ; and the people of this country so far from entertaining a jealousy on that occasion, would pour forth a profusion of acknowledgments, and surround his throne with blessings for the change of his advisers." In another part of His Majesty's speech, he mentions the co-operations of the just, benevolent, and pious Empress of Russia ; this certainly is a source of great satisfaction ; she has most generously furnished us with a fleet to protect our coast, to consume English provisions, and to learn British discipline. With regard to our prospect of important consequences to arise from the crisis in France ; these important consequences it seems are to be derived out of their distresses. Not that they are likely to become better citizens, better christians, more humane or more enlightened, but of their present bad system, we may look to a change, and the establishment of good government from their distresses. That good government should rise out of distress, was a kind of hope which he applauded ; and he wished the reasoning were extended to England. For surely, if from great distresses good government should arise, the people of England were in the high road of having a good government. The next cause of satisfaction was the prospect of the successes likely to happen in the West Indies. Hitherto there has been no cause of satisfaction in that quarter ; and if he was to put his finger on the most disgraceful of the dark catalogue of defects in the conduct of ministers during the present war, he could not find any more conspicuous than those which regard the West Indies. An honorable gentleman had mentioned it to the praise of ministers, that they did not bind themselves by specific declarations, nor had they any particular

view. This, indeed, was strange praise ; but if it was praise, he joined in it, and was ready to confess that he never knew the right honorable gentleman pledged to any one fixed principle. In the commerce of the world, that man was generally, but perhaps mistakenly, reputed worthy of confidence, who stuck to plain dealing, and who declared his objects, and acted upon them with consistency and perseverance.

In ministerial honesty different principles were adopted ; their conduct was veering with every change of circumstance ; in it we beheld a perpetual series of compromises and objects, perpetually changing, but never could we perceive a grand, open, or undisguised plan. Individual members of administration had distinct and favorite plans. One minister had the little tinsel bauble of Corsica glittering in his eyes. An honorable Secretary of State, he meant of the war, not of the sinecure department, had boasted that the expedition to the West-Indies was a favorite. This honorable gentleman was no knight-errant, he was one of those who wished to obtain some valuable acquisition, and had no objection to lay hold of an island to swell the number of our colonies. A young man (Mr. Jenkinson) more sanguine in the cause of the emigrants and of monarchy, proposed to march instantly to Paris. He wished to strike at the heart of the republic, while the allies only struck at the extremity. He would have fastened on the core, they only nibbled at the rind. Instead of assailing the capital, they only braved the dangers of Normoutier and Poitou. It was this policy which produced the wretched and miserable expedition to Quiberon ; which, however deep it may strike into the heart of sensibility, seems by no means to have made a deep impression on the minds of ministers, if it had, they could never have placed "satisfaction" the fifth word in His Majesty's Speech ; it was true, the blood of French emigrants only had flowed, it was not British blood

which had been spilt, but it was British honor that bled at every vein. If all these improvements, continued Mr. Sheridan, were not sufficient to give the people of Great Britain satisfaction, the flattering prospect is held out of great conquests and indemnification in the West-Indies. That there was a great preparation was true, but the public wished to know why the expedition had not sailed six weeks ago; the delay was a great act in the criminality in ministers; how much would that criminality be increased, when he informed the house that there was every probability that the fleet would not sail for a fortnight or three weeks longer; and at the present time, what was there not to be feared for our situation in these islands, in which there was not at that moment the complement of one full regiment of effective men? There were, indeed, the remains of six regiments of infantry, part of a regiment of light dragoons, and some artillery; but they did not altogether amount to the number of one full regiment. When, amid the gloom that surrounded us, we were to look, as a bright prospect, to our hope of success in the West Indies, he confessed himself dejected and dismayed. It would require a drain of men to insure success, which it would be impossible for this country to support. If 15,000 men should be sent against St. Domingo, and with that number we should be able to conquer the French part of that island, how many more would be necessary to effect the conquest of the Spanish part, not yet ceded to the French; and should we conquer all, what great and increased reinforcements would it be necessary to send to a country, when, in addition to the opposition of an active, vigorous, and subtle foe, our armies would have to encounter more perils from the elements than from the enemy. The mortality in Grenada was alarming indeed; out of one regiment 14 officers and near 400 men died from April to August last; nor had the sick and wounded in those islands necessary assistance. Men were sent into

the hospital of St. Pierre, in Martinique, without medicine or attendance; and those who were so ill, that to continue in the climate would be certain death (and many of whom had lost a limb in the service of their country) could not procure transports to bring them home; 90 or 100 were stowed, without sufficient accommodation, into the Supply transport; nay, in one instance, in consequence of some dispute, many of our maimed and sickly countrymen were relanded on one of the islands, and thus from a criminal and murderous neglect left upon the beach and abandoned to certain death. Could satisfaction arise to a good mind from the contemplation of such mortality? Were our hopes to be enlivened by the vain and illusory visions of conquests in that charnel house—the tombs of British soldiers?—Was this the cheering prospect held up to us—to behold our countrymen perishing under the fatal diseases of a pestilential climate?—Would it not be a matter of more humane satisfaction to avert these calamities?—Would it not be better to seize the first opportunity of negotiating for peace?—“We, on our side of the house,” continued Mr. Sheridan, “have told you before, to do as the King of Prussia has done; find out what government the French armies obey, under whose command and control they achieve such brilliant victories, and negotiate with them; we have told you to do as Spain has done; we now tell you to do as the Elector of Hanover has done.” Mr. Sheridan next adverted to the declaration of Louis XVIII. He had suspicions in his mind, that it was the intention of ministers to act up to the spirit of this declaration, and to establish, if possible, the old unqualified system of despotism in France. Against such an object he must make his stand, as far as it could avail. To the support or increase of the naval force for the defence of Great Britain and her commerce, he would willingly give his hearty support, but to establish the dominion of Louis XVIII. he would not give a

shilling of his constituents' money. If it were true, as it was suspected, that the heads of that proclamation were penned in this country, with the concurrence and under the direction of ministers; and that in conjunction with Louis XVIII. they wished to advise His Majesty to exhaust the treasures, and spill the blood of the country to restore the ancient tyranny of the French monarchy, they deserved to lose their heads. This he had before roundly asserted, and he would now repeat it; in his mind, the minister who advised Charles the Second to enter into the pay of France, was not a greater traitor to his country than our present minister, if he had acted as was strongly suspected. Why were the race of Stuarts expelled from this country, but because they entered into a league with France? and could any league be more destructive to this country than one with the house of Bourbon, who had been the uniform and inveterate enemies of Great Britain, its liberty, and its commerce? No association with the republic, could be so destructive to our interest; for never were there worse neighbours on earth than the French during their monarchies. It was certainly possible, that the conclusions which he had made in his own mind, might be erroneous, but, as far as he could judge of the spirit of their intentions, from the prevarication of ministers, he believed that they were simply watching for an opportunity of effecting a counter-revolution for the establishment of monarchy, and placing Louis upon his throne. This he believed to be the real view of ministers; and however other pretences might be made use of to delude the people, or satisfy the qualms of some scrupulous adherents, he could not but think that such was the true cause of delaying the restoration of peace to these kingdoms. Mr. Sheridan concluded by saying, that he would not move any amendment to an address which he disapproved of *in toto*; however, if any gentleman should propose an amendment, which would em-

brace three plain points, he would have no objection to vote for it first, "That we could no longer burden our constituents with taxes to support the delusive and unattainable views of ministers in the restoration of monarchy, or until some form of government should be established in France, which they may not imagine to be incapable of maintaining the accustomed relations of amity and peace." Secondly, "That a strict enquiry should be instituted into the conduct of ministers in the prosecution of the war, and into the causes of the unexampled calamities which had befallen the country." Lastly, "That His Majesty should be intreated to take such measures as might lead to the speedy restoration of peace."

In the subsequent part of the debate,

Mr. Sheridan explained, that the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) by quibbling on the word government, in a comment on one of his passages, had implied that he was desirous to adopt a new constitution. He knew not upon what principle it was that the right honorable gentleman imagined the existence of his administration, and the existence of the constitution, to be the same thing. Mr. Sheridan entertained such opposite ideas, that he looked upon the total annihilation of the right honorable gentleman's authority to be the happiest thing that could possibly happen to the constitution of this country.

The house divided ; for the address 140 ; against it 59.

NOVEMBER 9.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

A report had been spread, that an immense multitude of discontented persons had agreed to take the opportunity of the King going to the house of peers, on the 29th of October, of manifesting their sentiments to His Majesty in person. This of course excited the

curiosity of the public, and the Park was on that day crowded in a manner unprecedented since the King's accession to the throne. In his way to the house of lords, which lay through the Park, his coach was surrounded on every side by persons of all descriptions, demanding peace, and the dismissal of Mr. Pitt. Some voices were even heard exclaiming, No King, and stones were thrown at the state coach as it drew near to the Horse Guards. In passing through Palace-yard, one of the windows was broken, it was said, by a bullet discharged from an air-gun. These outrages were repeated on the King's return from the house, and he narrowly escaped the fury of the populace in his way back from St. James's Palace to Buckingham House. On the 31st of October a proclamation was issued, offering a thousand pounds for the discovery of any person guilty of those outrages. On the 4th of November it was followed by another, wherein it was said, that previously to the opening of parliament multitudes had been called together by hand-bills and advertisements, who met in the vicinity of the metropolis, where inflammatory speeches were made, and divers means used to sow discontent and excite seditious proceedings. These meetings and discourses were followed three days after by the most daring insults to the King, by which his person had been imminently endangered. Rumours had also been spread, that assemblies were to be held by disaffected people for illegal purposes. In consequence of those proceedings, it was enjoined by the proclamation to all magistrates, and well-affected subjects, to exert themselves in preventing and suppressing all unlawful meetings, and the dissemination of seditious writings. So great had been the alarm and indignation created by the treatment of the King, that as soon as he had gone through the reading of his speech, and had left the house, it was immediately ordered to be cleared of all strangers, and a consultation held by the lords, in what manner to proceed upon so extraordinary an occasion. An address to the King was resolved upon, and a conference with the house of commons to request their concurrence thereon. The majority agreed to this measure; but the Marquis of Lansdowne accused the ministers of intending to seize this opportunity to work upon the passions and fears of the people, and to lead their representatives into concessions derogatory to the public liberty, and debasing to their character, in order to confirm their own power at the expense of the constitution. A conference with the commons was held accordingly in the course of the day, and witnesses were examined, in relation to the outrages committed. Their evidence was communicated to the commons, and both houses unanimously concurred in the addresses proposed. On the 6th of November Lord Grenville brought forward a bill for better securing the King's person and government against treasonable and seditious practices and attempts; and on the 9th of November Mr. Pitt moved in the house of commons for leave to bring in a similar bill.

Mr. SHERIDAN rose and said, I must own that I have heard with more concern than surprise the speech of the honorable gentleman (Mr. Wilber-

force) who has just now sat down. I did indeed hope and believe, that in consequence of the warmth and indignation testified by my right honorable friend (Mr. Fox) which to me were not the least recommendations of his speech on the present occasion, that deep shame had struck the friends and associates of the right honorable gentleman dumb. [*A cry of hear, hear.*] Perhaps it may be conceived to have been unreasonable in me to have cherished such an expectation, or to have supposed that shame could have any influence in that quarter. But I argued well from their silence; I perceived something like shame in their countenances, and I was in hopes that contrition might follow. When the honorable gentleman rose, I still cherished the hope, notwithstanding repeated disappointments, that there had at last been found a measure of his right honorable friend too strong, even for him to approve. But I now find that, in supporting a measure which violates the fundamental principle of the bill of rights, the right of petitioning, the honorable gentleman consoles himself with the reflection that he is only doing his part to transmit to posterity the liberty we have derived from our ancestors. The honorable gentleman has discovered, that a regular conspiracy has been, for some years, going on against the constitution of the country. I do most firmly believe this to be the case; though, perhaps, I differ with him as to the quarter from which this conspiracy originates. The honorable gentleman has discovered that a spirit of sedition and disaffection to the government has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished. If this spirit exists at present, more than it has done since the commencement of the war, ministers have put a direct lie in the mouth of His Majesty, who, in his speech, at the opening of the session, stated the spirit of order and submission to the laws which had manifested itself among his faithful subjects. Were ministers then prepared to support the suspension of the habeas corpus act?

What was their argument on the first day of the session? They contended, that one of the blessed effects of the French war was, that it had almost completely eradicated French principles. Now it was found that the danger from those principles was so much increased in proportion to the increasing pressure which the war had brought upon the country, the inconvenience already felt from scarcity, and the apprehensions of approaching famine, that it was necessary for ministers to resort to such desperate measures of precaution, as had never before been attempted. The honorable gentleman affirms, those clubs and societies, which it is now the object to suppress, to be of recent origin; and asks, what were the liberties of the country, now supposed to be so much endangered, before their institution? These clubs and societies have existed in the country ever since the revolution. Of many of them, since the period of the American war, the honorable gentleman has himself been an active and distinguished member. And here I have occasion to regret that the honorable gentleman should be troubled with that shortness of memory which is incidental, in common with himself, to all the friends of the right honorable Chancellor of the Exchequer. In consequence of this defect, it is necessary for me to remind him of the active part he took in his opposition to the India bill; of his spirited, though unfortunate exertions for the abolition of the slave trade; and of his former support, in conjunction with his right honorable friend, to the cause of parliamentary reform. I ask him whether, upon all these occasions he would have gone on so triumphantly in his societies, or among his constituents, with a justice of peace at his elbow? My only consolation with respect to the proposed bill is, that its excessive folly and consummate absurdity are such as must defeat itself, and like other measures of ministers, I have no doubt that, after a few efforts, in consequence of being found untenable, it will be regularly

abandoned. A worthy magistrate (Mr. Lushington) took offence at being charged with an attack on the rights of juries. He defended, with great eloquence and animation, the right of posterity to improve upon the wisdom of their ancestors, and to adopt such improvements upon ancient institutions as their own better judgment may suggest. In consequence of this exertion of his eloquence, he no doubt will receive the thanks of the next meeting at Copenhagen House. Such an exertion, no doubt, might naturally have been expected in such a cause, when I recollect that the worthy alderman has himself been an active reformer ; and, if there be no offence in the title, a friend of the people. If he still retains a seat in the society, we shall have this advantage, that under the operation of the present bill, he may attend our meetings as a magistrate as well as a member. And from this circumstance, we shall have considerable reason to regret, if the worthy alderman has withdrawn himself from our society. An honorable baronet (Sir Wm. Pulteney) treated the subject with a degree of levity not at all consistent with the usual gravity of his manner. He seems to think that all the danger at popular meetings arises from the circumstance, that the speakers state only one side of the question. So that we must conceive the business of the magistrates to be—not to take up the people, but to take up the argument. In this case, where are we to find those able magistrates, and clever speakers, who are to attend all the meetings, to correct mis-statements, and supply the deficiency of information ? In Westminster, the head-quarters of these seditious assemblies, the magistrates are the hired creatures, and agents of ministers, a despicable set of paid, pensioned place-hunters ; neither capable to communicate information, nor to attend with impartiality. By the bye, he was reminded how violently the present Secretary at War had opposed the bill for throwing the magistracy into the hands of such a set

of men, and with what terms of contempt he had then treated their character. In order to qualify those magistrates for the task which the worthy baronet has assigned them, it will first be necessary to give them integrity; secondly, independence; and, lastly, ability to detect misrepresentation, and refute unfounded arguments, the consequence of all which must be, to take from them the only thing which they now possess, namely, their salaries. But the magistrates, it seems, are to attend, accompanied by their constables. In this case fair argument had but little chance. If a speaker, when interrupted by the magistrate, said, "You have not heard me out, allow me to explain myself," and the magistrate did not chuse that he should proceed, immediately the riot act was read, the constables interfered, and the meeting was forcibly dissolved. And this was what gentlemen called, "setting a man to rights," that is to say, "knocking him down." Upon my word, such nonsense can scarcely be made a subject of serious argument. As it is the nature of man always to resist oppression, how many magistrates will be wanted, in order to carry into effect this new system? Will it be necessary, as, to the disgrace of the service, it was with respect to surgeons' mates for the army, to advertize, "Wanted a number of magistrates," &c. I now speak in the hearing of a number of respectable gentlemen, who serve as justices of the peace, not one of whom, I am confident, if the present bill shall pass, will be disposed to act in that capacity, as the pensioned spy of ministers. Mr. Sheridan stated, that with regard to the assault upon His Majesty, he was totally ignorant of it on the evening it happened, and when he entered that house, had heard of nothing except some indistinct clamours. He wished to explain this circumstance, because the expressions he had made use of on the occasion had afforded matter of comment to some gentlemen, who were desirous to misrepresent his sentiments. He had seen in

a newspaper that day, he said a thing said to be heads of a bill introduced to parliament; he did not believe it: because of all that he had ever seen or read, nothing appeared to him so gross and scandalous a libel; he could not credit it to be the production of a sane man; but much less of any man who would dare to impute improper motives to the meeting at Copenhagen House; to that meeting he had never heard any solid charge laid; no riot, no disturbance; all was peaceable, sober, and consistent with the principles of the constitution; how then are we to account for the operations of the minister, but in his disappointment? he hoped for tumult, and peace disappointed his views. But there was another way of accounting for the minister's vindictiveness; the system of terror, which reigned last year died with the trials; it might now be wished to revive it; and instead of the connection which had been attempted to be made out between the proceedings at Copenhagen House, and the outrage on His Majesty, that outrage might probably be traced to some one of that army of spies, who, having been thrown out of employ in consequence of plots being discredited, and the suspension of the habeas corpus repealed, might be desirous to revive the profitable trade of alarm, and might think too, that he did a thing not ungrateful to ministers, by affording them a plausible pretext to destroy the liberties of the country. From the general distrust which he had of every fresh attempt to create alarm, he was led to conclude, that if the minister was to follow up the enquiry with respect to the authors of the outrage, it would end in the execution of one of his own spies. He concluded with an apostrophe to the Speaker, who, he hoped, would imitate many of his virtuous predecessors, by treating the proffered bill, should it be attempted to be brought before the house, with the indignant resentment which it merited, as an insult to the dignity of the house, and not even suffering it to be

read. For my part, said Mr. Sheridan, if this bill shall pass, I shall think myself unworthy to continue longer the prattling representative of a dumb and enslaved people, and I shall consider this house as unworthy that exception which secures to them that freedom of discussion, which they will then have so justly forfeited.

The house divided on the motion for leave to bring in the bill; ayes 214; noes 42.

Mr. Fox then moved, "That the house be called over this day fortnight." Mr. Dundas said, that he would not oppose the call, though, in general, he thought a call of the house either nugatory or harassing. But, in this particular instance, it might be proper, for he was willing to own, that unless it was obvious that this bill had the concurrence of the majority of the people of England, it ought not to be passed into a law. That it would be found to have such concurrence he had no doubt, for he had been besieged in his office, for months past, with applications for such a bill; and it was by the advice of a number of gentlemen that ministers had at length brought it forward.

Mr. Sheridan said, that this attempt to conceal the authors of the bill was an acknowledgment on their own parts of its dangerous tendency; they wished to make it doubtful from whence it came. He had no doubt, but that if time was given, the honorable gentleman would find the opinion of the public very pointedly expressed, and very loudly, against a bill, which struck at the foundation of British liberty; a bill which was called for by no circumstances, except what he believed ministers called the providential outrage on His Majesty.

Mr. Sheridan thought it necessary to declare, that he should not content himself with opposing the principle; he should oppose the bill in every stage of the committee, as well as out of it; and in the detail as well as in the principle.

The call of the house was agreed to.

NOVEMBER 12.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

Mr. Pitt moved the first reading of this bill.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that the honorable gentleman (Mr. Canning), who argued so logically on this pretended connection, had by no means convinced his mind that it was to be traced; the connection which he had to look for on the occasion, was one of which he had also a doubt, he meant the connection between the honorable gentleman's assertions and the fact, when he said that the meeting preached up the doctrine of king killing. That some scandalous hand-bills might have been circulated, he did not doubt; but he believed they were manufactured and fabricated by the spies and informers of government. In this conjecture, he was justified by the former practices of ministers, proved in the face of the country. Did it not appear by the confession of the wretches themselves on the state trials, that in public meetings they had been clamorous and indecent; that they had purposely used the most seditious expressions, and this they accounted for by saying that they did so that their real views in attending these meetings should not be suspected. Thus, it appeared, that the only persons traitorous and seditious, were those who were daily paid by His Majesty's ministers. Was not there the strongest probability that the writers of these hand-bills were paid and supported by the Treasury? He had read in the newspapers the proceedings of that meeting, and he did not think they were either treasonable or seditious; if they were, the existing laws were sufficient to punish the persons guilty; and they ought to be punished. Would ministers pretend, that if seditious or treasonable speeches were uttered, they could not have procured evidence that would have brought the charges home to attach on the individuals who had uttered them? The meeting was

neither in a private room nor inaccessible; and would ministers have the front to pretend that they had not spies by these pulpits, to hear, and faithfully to record, what passed? If sedition was there preached, ministers incurred the charge of supineness and criminal neglect in not bringing the offenders to justice. Their not making any such attempt was a convincing proof to him, that the speeches had nothing of treason or sedition in them. In order that the house might be acquainted with the actual state of the country, Mr. Sheridan then gave notice that he would, on Monday next, move for a committee to enquire into the necessity of such a measure, and whether this spirit of sedition did or did not exist. This he thought it his duty to do, on account of the manner in which ministers had treated the subject.—They had in the King's speech asserted, that almost all discontent was put an end to, and now they alleged it was so great as to make necessary more rigorous measures than any that have been proposed since the revolution. He believed, indeed, that ministers endeavored to impose on the public in this, as they had done on a former occasion.

Mr. Alderman Anderson decidedly approved of the bill, though he was utterly unacquainted with its contents, having but just come to town. He entertained the greatest dread of the seditious meetings which had been held, and thought some strong measure necessary to counteract them. He was convinced that a great majority of his constituents were actuated by the same sentiment, upon similar principles. Desperate acts, the worthy Alderman observed, required desperate remedies. As he was coming to town from Hampstead, this afternoon, he was surprised to see such a number of people on the road; and, on enquiring the cause, he was informed at a turnpike-gate, that 30,000 people had assembled at Copenhagen House, for the purpose of seditious communication. He was also a good deal struck with one part of the information which he had received, that Mr. Thelwall, and some of the leaders of the meeting, were very much disappointed at not having got a phaeton of a certain noble Duke, from which they intended to harangue the people.

The Alderman being called upon to name the noble Duke alluded to in his speech, rose, and said a few words, about the right of members to state such circumstances as might be connected with the question.

Mr. Sheridan said, the question came to this, that the worthy alderman, by observing silence, had seemed to persevere in his belief of the story he had told. He was surprised that the Duke of Bedford should be held out as countenancing any meetings which were deemed licentious, when he saw that respected name subscribed publicly to a paper which would confer immortal honor on his character, and was intended to encourage an universal and decided opposition to the present bill. It was indeed a story which was fit for old wives to tell, and old wives to believe. He imagined the next would be, that the orators of Copenhagen House had borrowed bob wigs from the Duke of Norfolk, in order to make their appearances. All such idle tales, however, only proved the incessant calumnies to which the opposers of ministers were subject. A shocking instance of the malicious and wicked attempt, which arose from the system that ministers patronized, happened during the state trials last year. At the very time when the bill was before the grand jury, in the case of those men whom a certain honorable gentleman chose to term "acquitted felons;" a story, which could not fail to impress instantly the public mind, of a terrible design to murder the King, by means of some new kind of instrument, was propagated. This was generally believed at the time, yet no such plot had been conceived, he believed, and this instrument no person had ever seen. Notwithstanding all this, prints, notoriously in ministerial pay, had said that the instrument was found, and the persons fully committed for trial. Thus, it was evident, how ministers would avail themselves of every incident which occurred, to render suspicious men whose influence and character might enable them to oppose their measures with success.

Lord William Russel moved an adjournment, in order that an enquiry might take place into the facts, which had been stated as reasons for supporting the bill by Alderman Anderson.

A division took place ; ayes 32 : noes 145.—The bill was then read a first time.

Mr. Sheridan observed, that he was happy to find that the honorable gentleman had abandoned part of his plan, since he had expunged that clause which related to private families. He was surprised, however, to find that meetings in fields, assembled without regard to the regulations in the bill, were to be held as disorderly houses.

The house divided on the question, that the bill be read a second time ; ayes 129 ; noes 22.—A second division took place on the question, “ That this bill be read a second time on Tuesday next ; ayes 129 ; noes 23.

NOVEMBER 16.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

A message was brought from the lords, that they had passed a bill for the better security of His Majesty's person, &c. Mr. Pitt moved, “ That the bill be read a first time.”

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that it was not usual with him to argue a bill on the first reading of it, nor did he wish to enter upon that discussion at present ; he would, therefore, only say, that he wished first of all to have the bill printed for the use of the members, and being determined to oppose it in every stage of its progress, he would take the sense of the house whether the bill should be read for the first time.

A division took place ; ayes 170 ; noes 26.—Mr. Pitt then moved, “ That the bill be read a second time on Tuesday next.—The house divided ; ayes 151 ; noes 25.

Mr. Sheridan asked whether such a necessity did exist as justified the bill in question ? If this necessity did exist, then such a declaration went exactly to this point, that proof was attainable, and, therefore, that proof should be given. For his part, however, he had heard of no satisfactory proof for

recurring to so violent a measure, nor had any satisfactory proof been yet adduced. Before the suspension of the habeas corpus act, ministers had condescended to act with some little decency, with some deliberation, and had accordingly moved for the appointment of a committee of enquiry, upon the report of which committee they afterwards proceeded. If the report was necessary then, it was now more indispensable; for upon what possible principle could they call upon the members of that house to assent to the strong measures which were then offered them, unless they established an absolute necessity for such proceedings, and confirmed it by evidence?—He would not stoop to the proclamation as a proof, for he considered that proclamation as the declaration of the minister. What authority then was there for consenting to this bill? The evidence in the house of lords, and the address of congratulation to His Majesty for his escape? That was not sufficient; for without examining a single witness, the house had been content to take the matter as it stood, and had joined in that address of the other house, without any farther enquiry. To this he did not object, so far as it related to the address alone; on the contrary, he very readily concurred; but did any man think that that evidence, taken in the house of lords, so vague and contradictory as it was in every part of it, and that address which followed, were by any means sufficient to justify two bills like those which were in consequence produced? When he considered this more deliberately, he was placed in a disagreeable dilemma; for either he was obliged to imagine that a large body of men, capable of committing treason and the most horrible outrages, was actually in motion; or else he must suppose that there were men capable of inventing and believing any thing, who, for their own base purposes, or from the influence of the most deplorable credulity, cherished the idea of pretended sedition, to accomplish their designs of destroying the liberties of their

country. It was always more hard to believe the lesser evil, though in this precise instance he was compelled to do so. He was not only inclined to think, but confirmed in his opinion by subsequent events, that the present alarm had been created solely by ministers, for the accomplishment of their corrupt purposes of libelling the country. He again repeated that this opinion was not grounded upon any superficial view of the subject, but from the express experience of the conduct, temper, and loyalty of the people. He remarked, that in 1792, for similar purposes, similar reports of plots and conspiracies had been industriously circulated.— They were asserted in parliament; they were pointed out in publications; and then, as now, they formed a part of the King's proclamation. It was then generally rumoured, and as generally believed, that a party was in readiness to seize the Tower, and commence a revolution. Before any person took notice of this manœuvre too, the most extraordinary means were adopted and enforced to circulate the proclamation through every part of the kingdom with unexampled rapidity; troops were thrown into the Tower to defend it from attack, and all the government appeared in consternation and dismay. He remembered also in the course of the trials which followed, that he had the most complete and distinct proof that the whole of these atrocious acts originated with the informers, reporters, and spies employed on that occasion. Objection might be made to his attendance on those trials; but as he had some cause to doubt the existence of conspiracies, he was resolved to see fair play, and he only discharged his duty as a member of parliament, and one of the guardians of the public welfare, in so doing. At those trials, he again repeated, that he found the whole idea of a revolution to be forged; that the informers, reporters, and spies, one and all, declared, that they never had suggested such danger was existing, and that the whole, upon the

clearest and best connected evidence, was proved to be a fabrication. Now, this demonstrated how far the declarations of ministers were to be trusted. It was true that a committee had been appointed, and that from that committee they received accounts of an extensive treasonable plot. The existence of the plot, however, was brought from higher authority, and the trials were deferred till books could be prepared with suitable decorations, and the copper-plates engraved, with the representation of pikes to alarm and irritate the public mind. Here he came again to the juries, who in repeated cases negatived the existence of any treason or conspiracy. At the same time, however, we received intelligence of a third plot, of which he had had occasion to speak before. A plot which was investigated by the magistrates of Government, and in some degree confirmed by their proceedings. A plot which was published with every dreadful particular, and exaggerating comment, in all the ministerial papers. This supposed plot, after all, was a contrivance for the assassination of His Majesty at one of the theatres, with a strange instrument which was never found, and by men who were afterwards released. It was discovered, or pretended to be discovered, which with ministers was nearly the same thing, at a very seasonable time, for it was while the bill was pending upon which the other persons, who were afterwards acquitted by the juries, were indicted. He knew not whether ministers had purposely contrived this plot to prejudice the minds of those juries; he hoped, he believed they could not be so deliberately cruel. It was an action however, which would always expose them to censure, and he knew not with what feelings they could consider it, when they recollected that men had been for a long time detained in prison, and afterwards discharged without any allegations, ruined in their fortunes, as some of them he had heard had been, and undone in their reputations. It was certainly

clear that the men who were apprehended upon this horrible scheme of assassination, were not guilty of the crime laid to their charge, or they would not have been released in the manner they had been ; and what redress could be given them he was not able to tell, nor was it his business to inquire. This, however, was the third proof of forgery. He now came to the present times. Here he was obliged again to recur to His Majesty's speech upon the opening of parliament. That speech, which praises the loyal temper of the people, and recommends the spirit of order and submission to the laws which they had shewn under a severe pressure, as an additional incentive for parliament to apply with the utmost diligence to the consideration of such measures as may tend to alleviate their distresses. When this declaration was delivered, it is plain that ministers had no idea of the existing panic. We then heard congratulations in that house upon the advantages derived from the war ; one of which was, that it had not only destroyed all violent revolutionary principles in France, but that it had produced a similar effect upon men's minds in this country. Here Mr. Sheridan wished to know how they could possibly reconcile these declarations with those which they have since made. How could they presume, in consequence of one desperate outrage committed by some misguided individual, or, at the most, upon their own confession, by a few miscreants, to deprive so loyal, so patient so submissive a people as they acknowledged the majority to be, of their dearest and most sacred rights ? He recollected, indeed, what the right honorable gentleman had that day said with great warmth, when reminding him that he had forgotten the progressive irritation ; " What," said he, when meetings have multiplied and hand-bills are swarming every where, shall we assert there is no necessity for these restrictions ?" But these meetings, then, must have multiplied since the meet-

ing of parliament; these hand-bills must have swarmed since the meeting of parliament: because, if they were so notorious before, why did they put that declaration into His Majesty's mouth; or why did the right honorable gentleman himself assert that French principles were almost eradicated by the war. Upon these grounds, Mr. Sheridan insisted, that he still had reason to believe it a forged plot. If the right honorable gentleman would persevere in his declarations that an increasing alarm and spirit of discontent prevailed throughout the country, let him prove it. He had moved a committee before, then why not now? He took measures then for the investigation of a plot, when the reasons were not one hundred thousandth part so strong. If he therefore now asserts that a treasonable plot is actually in existence, and flies from an investigation of it, is it not natural to conclude he cannot prove it? But he thinks all proof unnecessary, provided he can persuade the House to adopt his declaration. Yet surely when he spoke of the unanimous loyalty of an unanimous people, though he suddenly seemed apprehensive lest some advantage should be taken of his words in that construction, by adding "with a small exception," yet surely I say, repeated Mr. Sheridan, when he spoke of such unanimous loyalty, he cannot persist; nor would any man say that for the ungovernable licentiousness of the few excepted, all these obedient, virtuous, generous, and uncomplaining people should be deprived of their dearest liberties. No person, however hardened, could have the front to do it. But the right honorable gentleman always flies off to France for his examples. France is the war-horse he mounts upon these occasions, and it would be a happy thing for this country if he would mount that war-horse less often. In France he enumerates all the instances of treason, murder, and rebellion which arose from popular assemblies. In France he recapitulates the various atrocities of anarchy and

bloodshed; the confusion and desolation which followed the commotions of the people; and then exclaims, if such and such causes produce such and such effects in France, would not similar causes produce similar effects in England? But is it not a libel on the English Constitution; is it not a libel on the English people, to draw such conclusions? There is no parity whatever; and he had always deprecated such a wretched, narrow, miserable mode of reasoning. The right honorable gentleman had forgotten surely, that the enormities of the French people were occasioned by the despotism under which they had so long groaned; that their excesses, when free, were to be attributed to their former slavery; that they had been oppressed and ground down till they had lost the common feelings and the common character of humanity, and that they were provoked and instigated by the evils which surrounded them till they became enraged beyond all moderation. He therefore denied that similar enormities could ever happen in England, and condemned such an opinion as one of the most mischievous that ever entered the head of a statesman. To argue that the same principles would have the same influence over Englishmen as they have had over the deluded people of France, was to argue with a total ignorance of history, of general policy, and of human nature itself. It was impossible that any thing could work so fatal an ascendancy, not even if the same men who brought about those evils in France were to be in possession of similar authority here. It was the despotic government that had degraded and debased the French beneath the dignity of men, and drove them to extremes; but a people who have been used to rational liberty and rational rights, who have not been ground down, nor made the slaves of a corrupt Government would never be guilty of such crimes. He pressed this the more, because it was the sole principle upon which the gentlemen of the opposite side rested;

and unless it could be proved absolutely that the bill was intended for the protection of the Monarch and the Constitution, he was unwilling to surrender the rights and liberties of the subject on such slight grounds. To detect the fallacy and false principles of such reasoning in a parallel view, he might urge that it would equally apply to prove in all cases, the barbarity and ill faith of monarchs; and that after expatiating on the cruel conduct of the Empress of Russia, and the bad faith of the King of Prussia, an enemy to limited monarchy would be entitled to draw a conclusion that all monarchs must be barbarous and faithless, and thence contend for curtailing the power of the present King of England. The parallels would run together, and it would be found great difficulty to oppose the force of such reasoning. An honorable gentleman had said the other night that desperate evils must have desperate remedies. This he acknowledged; but then he insisted that the existence of the evils should be proved. The connection between the popular meetings and the outrage on His Majesty he denied; and thought at the late county meeting for Hertfordshire, an honorable gentleman (Mr. Baker) had acted with great impropriety in coupling the congratulation to His Majesty with a charge against the societies. He called it a charge so long as it was possible to have investigation; but if it were possible to have investigation, and gentlemen should then fly from it, he should no longer call it a charge but a calumny. An honourable gentleman (Mr. Canning) had asserted also, that the doctrine of king killing was preached at Copenhagen House. Now if such doctrines had been preached, prosecutions must have been commenced, or else there must have been great neglect in the magistrates and the Executive Government, and consequently he was authorised to disbelieve it. So far however from preaching such pernicious doctrines, it was generally known that they professed a spirit of loy-

alty to His Majesty, notwithstanding their declamations against his ministers, against the war, and in support of a parliamentary reform. Another right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had that evening said, that inflammatory hand-bills were swarming in every part of the metropolis. Why might not these hand-bills be written and published by some of the spies for their own profit and advantage? Had not the spies themselves confessed in a court of justice, that to encourage and deceive others they were the loudest in a cry for a reform, and the most forward to use inflammatory language? Here again then, he had no proof that those hand-bills were published or circulated by the societies, unless they would suffer him to know from whom those hand-bills came, and how they were obtained. If once a government encourages spies and informers, it becomes a part of their business to commit such forgeries and create such terror. The right honorable gentleman might contradict him by saying that the business of spies and informers is a respectable and necessary trade; but Mr. Sheridan maintained it would never be respected by mankind, and therefore, such odium and such suspicions must of course attach to it. Except in the solitary instance of Watts, however, he conceived it expedient that ministers should support their spies with whom they acted, as the men formerly did who brought up thieves, and instructed them while young in stealing, to share their profits. He had himself heard a person declare, that in the heat of his zeal and loyalty, he appointed a person to watch those whom he suspected, for which he gave him a guinea per week, but that at the last he brought his accounts so alarming, that he gave him two guineas a week. Such, he said, would be the case, and we should go on from worse to worse, and he would not fear to attribute it to these very measures. He then took notice of the immense meeting which had that day been assembled in Westminster, and the

order and decorum exhibited on that occasion ; yet, if this meeting had been held before the meeting of parliament, he should not have been surprised if it had been used as an argument for the necessity of this bill. He wished an honorable gentleman (Mr. Canning) would come into his committee and prove that the societies did preach the doctrine of king killing ; and concluded by moving “ That a committee be appointed, to inquire into the existence and extent of the danger of seditious meetings, as referred to in His Majesty’s proclamation, and laid before the house by His Majesty’s minister on the fourth of November.”

NOVEMBER 17.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

On the question of the second reading of this bill,

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that he thought it most unlikely that he should have been called upon to trouble the house. It was his intention to have left the discussion to other gentlemen, who had taken a less active share in the former stages of the debate, and who had more ability to command the attention of the house. He did not know whether he should be able to answer the speech of the noble Lord, (Mornington), which was marked, at least, with some degree of labour and preparation. But he might now at least take to himself the credit of having predicted what would be the case, when the house had refused his motion of inquiry. He had then said, that though they declined inquiry, they would take other means of bringing forward information of a nature calculated to aid the impression which they meant to convey to the house. That the learned gentleman would begin skirmishing with his extracts and paragraphs ; that the noble Lord would come forward with his heavy artillery of speeches and pamphlets ; and, perhaps, that some other honorable gentleman might be ready to produce cuts and prints, in order to confirm the state-

ments of the others. All this he had expected, nor had he been greatly disappointed in the event. But he had declared, on a former occasion, that he gave no credit to the assertions of the honorable gentlemen on that side of the question. He spoke not from any motive of personal disrespect, but from the repeated experience of what had been the system of their policy; but if he gave no credit in general to the assertions of that party, much less was he disposed to give credit to the assertions of the noble lord. He recollected that he had two years since come forward, in the same sonorous tone, and with the same pompous manner, with the same assumed air of importance, leaning upon the table, bringing forward scrap after scrap, and quoting passage after passage, in order to prove that France would only be able to carry on the war for a few months longer. In the event, however, the noble lord had been most completely mistaken; France had found means to carry on the war long beyond the period which the noble lord had fixed for the termination of her resources, and was now even more formidable to her enemies than at the period when the noble lord had so confidently predicted her destruction. Yet undiscouraged by this failure of his predictions, he now came forward with the same tone, and in the same attitude, to announce, that a revolution was now pending in England. Events had completely falsified all his former assertions; the disappointment, however, had not prevented a repetition of the same presumptuous airs, and the same dogmatical propositions on the present occasion. The noble lord asserted, that he had made out a connection between the outrage against His Majesty, and the proceedings of the meeting at Copenhagen House—a connection, however, which, Mr. Sheridan said, he would contend to be as remote as was that of the speech of the noble lord, with the question before the house. The noble lord had stated, that there must be something extraordinary in the

outrage against His Majesty, from the general character of loyalty which had been maintained by the people of the country, and had intimated that this outrage must be ascribed to motives very different from those which had existed at former times. There were, however, other times, and those too not very remote, when a few desperate persons had been guilty of nearly similar acts of outrage against His Majesty. He alluded to what had taken place at the period of the Middlesex election. He asked the noble lord whether a similar spirit of outrage had not manifested itself in other parts of the country—whether tumults and riots had not taken place of so serious a nature, that the aid of the military had been called in, and the troops of His Majesty (what must always be severely deplored) had shed the blood of his subjects? To what, said Mr. Sheridan, was this temper of irritation and tumult in so many parts of the country to be ascribed?—Not, he was convinced, to any exertions of the Corresponding Society; for these symptoms had appeared in quarters where they could not have been supposed to have had any influence; they were to be ascribed to the general state of pressure arising from the war, to the apprehensions of approaching scarcity, and in some instances, to the actual ravages of famine. He respected the person of the Sovereign, but he still more respected the law, which was above even the Sovereign. And if he saw men rash, irritated, driven to extremity from the grinding and biting influence of poverty, while repairing home to their starving families, excited to a violation of the law, might he not believe that the same persons would, under the same circumstances, be provoked to outrage against the Sovereign? If he saw the one, had he not a right to infer the other, without having recourse to any intermediate cause? The noble lord was particularly indignant at theoretical lectures on government. The speech of the noble lord was, however, nothing else than a theoretical lecture on government, bating the few ex-

tracts which he had contrived to introduce, and a lecture, for which, Mr. Sheridan said, he would not give sixpence. He then adverted to the maxim brought forward by His Majesty's ministers, that the same doctrine would produce the same effects upon the minds of the vulgar in all countries; the narrowest maxim that ever entered into the mind of a statesman. With respect to Geneva, which the noble lord had referred to as displaying the effects resulting from the introduction of French principles, would the noble lord contend that Geneva had ever enjoyed the same constitution as Great Britain? His lordship had on this occasion quoted the authority of D'Ivernois, whose opinion might be suspected to be somewhat biassed, as he was a pensioner of Ministers. Geneva had been alternately subject to France and Savoy, and had been continually torn asunder by contending factions. The noble lord had alluded to America, as displaying the effect of Republican principles; in this part of the allusion, however, he could not follow his lordship; America was at peace with this country, and in a state of the highest prosperity. The reasoning that might be found to hold with respect to persons under a different government, would not apply to subjects of the British constitution. Men bred under a constitution like this, were accustomed to the enjoyment of their rights; they were in the habits of discussing the measure of rational freedom, and fully knew how to prize its blessings. It was not probable that such men should all at once be brought to relish a state of anarchy. Of what stuff did ministers think that the hearts of Englishmen were made? He remarked, that the true character of Englishmen could be but little known to ministers, who had, from motives of pride, declined to mix in popular assemblies; and who afterwards, from their political practices, might think it not very safe to meet any numerous assemblage of their countrymen. It

is not to be wondered at that such ministers should say, that the hearts of Englishmen are the same as those of Frenchmen, and that the propagation of the same doctrines would produce the same effects upon their conduct. He remarked, that when the noble lord had talked of the positive and foul treason which had issued from the shop of Citizen Lee, it might very naturally have been asked, why the Attorney General had not prosecuted Citizen Lee? The noble lord regretted the repeal of the suspension of the habeas corpus, and had stated, that ever since that period things had been going on in a state progressively worse. The noble lord had expressed great indignation at the attempt to divide the higher from the inferior classes. Upon this he must remark, that those who held out the poor as the objects of apprehension, shewed, at the same time, that they felt the necessity of additional securities to their own property. Hence was afforded a pretext for the multiplication of the penal laws. He had confidence in the hearts of the poor of this country, and from that circumstance he was enabled to treat with contempt the idea of the existence of those false plots. He remarked, that there were but few who were disposed to treat the idea of those plots with any degree of seriousness. It was therefore the more abominable that they should be made the pretext of depriving the people of the country of the most-valuable part of their freedom. Mr. Sheridan remarked, that the scraps and extracts which had been read to them were not evidence. Such was his bad opinion of ministers, that he even believed that their own agents might be the fabricators of the papers charged upon the Corresponding Society. As to the hand-bill entitled King-killing, he himself should treat it with the most perfect disregard, for he was assured it could excite but one sentiment in the people of this country—universal abhorrence and contempt. Mr. Sheridan here adverted to a circumstance which he had mentioned

before, the treatment of those concerned in the poisoned arrow, or pop-gun plot. What an handle had ministers made of this report, even though they must, from the first moment, have been sensible of its futility. What an impression had they not, by that means, endeavoured to circulate through the country. But what had been the treatment of the unfortunate men against whom the charge was brought? They had been confined in prison for a number of months, and were at last dismissed upon bail, without being brought to trial, blasted in their characters, and bankrupt in their fortunes. Such a mode of procedure argued a total want of feeling and of principle in those who could sanction it by their authority. Mr. Sheridan appealed to gentlemen whether they had that satisfactory and conscientious evidence of the grounds upon which ministers had brought forward their measures, which could justify them in dispensing with an inquiry, and enable them to say that they had fully done their duty to their constituents. Was it possible that the house could be satisfied with the miserable proofs adduced by the noble lord? With the utmost diligence and industry had the noble lord been looking for plots, but he could find none. Would the house decide on the most important subject ever offered to their consideration, upon vile scraps, collected by rummaging every old book-shop, and turning up the dirt of every filthy stall in London? Good God Almighty! in what place was it that he spoke? To whom did he address himself? How would the members of that house face their constituents, after sacrificing every thing held valuable by their ancestors, if they should agree to make that sacrifice without all the information and all the proofs which the nature of the case would admit? What might convince them, might not have the same effect upon others. They should consider that they were all of them the servants of the people of England. They voted and acted in that house not in their individual

capacity, but as agents and attorneys for others, and they would not perform their duty, if they could not satisfy the reasonable inquiries of their constituents. He was of opinion that this measure would create that disaffection and those plots, the supposed existence of which was made the pretext for its adoption. There was nothing which he deprecated more than a revolution ; but he believed it was not impossible that the people might be driven to some violent remedy, rendered by circumstances plausible, if not necessary. With regard to the London Corresponding Society, he could not join in the clamour that had been raised against it. He did not doubt but it might contain persons who had nothing in view but their own interest, while they appeared to be actuated only by motives of patriotism. For in what society (that alone excepted in which he had now the honour to speak) were there not such interested and unworthy persons to be found ? He denied that the people of England were a disloyal or an ungrateful race ? Mr. Attorney General need not (in the debate of last night) have lamented so pathetically the danger of his son not attaining to the honor and emoluments which he so deservedly enjoyed—honors and emoluments for which he was indebted not only to industry, but to great talents and an unblemished character. There did not appear any danger that the emoluments of office or of professions would decrease. It was much more probable that the condition of the poor would become worse. He would ask any gentleman of estate, any merchant, or man of property, who had performed acts of generosity to the people, whether they had ever found them unthankful. The house should now look and see, whether they were not going to give the people cause to be unthankful and discontented. The minister, who was now raising guards and securities for himself, reckoned, perhaps, too much on the patience of the people ; the house should be cautious of irritating them.

Sir John Rous said, he had been absent from the house a short time, owing to indisposition; but he understood it had been stated by a gentleman on the other side of the house, that if members gave their assent to the present bill, they could never dare to face their constituents. He wholly denied any such assertion; and to prove what were the sentiments of his constituents, a meeting had been held the preceding day in Suffolk, at which it was unanimously resolved to instruct their members to support any measure which might be brought forward to secure His Majesty's government, and check those seditious assemblies which had so justly alarmed the nation.

Mr. Sheridan, in reply to what had dropped from Sir John Rous, said, that the honorable baronet had been egregiously misinformed as to the purport of the expression which he had employed. What he said was, that if the committee which he required for the purpose of ascertaining certain facts, was not granted by the members of that house, when they next met their constituents, they must inform them that they had given their support to the bill before the house, without having taken the means of informing themselves of the grounds on which so extraordinary a measure was founded.

The house divided; for the second reading 213; against it 43.

NOVEMBER 23.

TREASON AND SEDITION.

Lord Sheffield presented a petition from the inhabitants of Bristol, praying that the aforesaid bills might not pass into a law.

Mr. SHERIDAN remarked that the petition seemed to have fallen into improper hands, for the noble Lord had not made any observations upon it, nor had he mentioned by how many persons it was signed by, though Mr. Sheridan understood it was signed by no less than four thousand.

Lord Sheffield having said a few words in reply—

Mr. Sheridan repeated what he had before suspected, that the petition had fallen into improper

hands; nor was he the only person who suspected this, for he had received a letter from a gentleman at Bristol, who was apprehensive that the noble lord would not make it known to be the general sense of the inhabitants of Bristol, and did therefore wish that it should be stated to the house. The petition was drawn up and signed in due form, and the signatures were those of the most respectable persons in that city.

The petition was ordered to lie on the table.

Mr. Sheridan presented a petition from the inhabitants of Chester against the bills. He said, that in this city, as well as in various parts of the country, counter petitions were attempted to be procured, a principle to which government had long been attentive. The late outrage on His Majesty's person, which no man execrated more than he did, had been taken advantage of by them, to extort from the people a sanction of the present measures, for which purpose they had used all their influence. But he would, notwithstanding, venture to assert, that none of the few petitions which called for the suppression of seditious meetings were meant to convey any acquiescence in the measures which ministers were determined to adopt under that pretence; and even a right honorable gentleman opposite to him, (Mr. Dundas) had allowed, that laws so serious should not take place, unless agreed to by a majority of the people. Where then were the grounds for pressing the bills, when it could not be proved that in one single instance, their contents had been explained, or properly understood by the persons who might be supposed to favour them? He read a letter which accompanied the petition, addressed to himself, explaining the conduct of those who were endeavouring to procure signatures to a counter-petition in the city of Chester, where schoolboys, and all manner of persons, had been called upon to sign a paper of that nature; and so hasty were they to accomplish

their object, that time was not allowed to the subscribers to read the petition.

Lord Belgrave assured the house, that he had received a letter from Chester, informing him, that an address to the King, from the respectable inhabitants, praying for strong measures against the seditious societies, was in a state of much forwardness. As the honorable gentleman (Mr. Sheridan) had stated, that the persons whose names were signed to the petition then before them, were of such considerable respectability, he should beg leave to read the description which he had received of them:—it described them as jacobins, who had undertaken a job, for which they wanted many hands; and expressed a probability that they might, in a great measure, be successful, as several school-boys and dissenters had been induced to sign the article, as had also some well-disposed persons, whom they had prevailed upon, by asking them whether they had any objection to a good peace. His lordship judged it necessary to communicate so much to the house, for the purpose of shewing that they were not the most respectable part of the citizens, but the lower class of the people of Chester, who had signed the petition in question.

Mr. Sheridan observed, that it was by no means improbable that many of the lower classes of the people had signed the petition, and for this cogent reason, that they wished for an alleviation of their distresses, by the return of peace. With respect to calling schoolboys away from their lessons on this occasion, he believed that applied better to the other side of the question, and he certainly thought it highly improper to take them away from learning their Greek. The meeting had been regularly and duly convened by public advertisement, and the unanimity which prevailed on the occasion was almost universal. If it was true that the present petition was signed only by the lower orders, it was highly favorable to their understanding, and proved that they were far better judges of the constitution of England than the higher class, who were about to adopt a different line of conduct; for they had communicated their sentiments to the proper branch of the legislature, while their superiors had resolved to petition the King, who had nothing to do with the formation of laws, to take strong measures for suppressing seditious meetings. What could betray

more ignorance than this; or what could be a greater insult offered to the constitution than a recommendation to His Majesty to enact laws, and thereby to exercise a power which belongs only to the legislature? He could not forbear remarking, that the noble lord seemed attached to that system which drew a line between the higher and lower ranks of life.

Lord Belgrave said, that the success imputed to the petition was apprehended from the private and insidious means made use of; whereas the address was openly voted at a public meeting called by the mayor. No one knew of the meeting for the petition, it being only advertised in one inflammatory newspaper.

Mr. Sheridan conceived, that after the bill was passed, according to this argument, that there never could be a public meeting, for all opposition papers would be esteemed inflammatory and seditious.

The petition was then read by the clerk, and ordered to lie on the table.

Mr. Sheridan then presented a petition from Sheffield against the bills, signed by near 8000 persons, many of whom were of the first consequence and respectability. This he thought it necessary to mention, lest the name of Sheffield should frighten any gentleman in that house, who might bear in his remembrance the indignant treatment which a former petition from that town had experienced.

Ordered to lie on the table.

Mr. Sturt presented a petition from the London Corresponding Society, signed by 12,113 persons, against the bills. He warmly exculpated that society from the imputations of treason or sedition. In order to shew, at the same time, the malevolent intentions of ministry and its partizans, he produced a performance, attributed to Mr. Reeves, (the framer and president of the associations against republicans and levellers,) wherein it was unequivocally maintained, "that the government of England was a monarchy; that the monarch was the ancient stock, from which have sprung those goodly branches of the legislature, the lords and commons; that these, however, were still only branches; and that they might be lopped off, and the tree be a tree still,—shorn, indeed, of its honors, but not, like them, cast into the fire." So flagrant a violation of the prin-

ciples of the English constitution, excited the indignation, not only of the opposition, but of many of the members friendly to ministers. The public loudly proclaimed it a stab aimed at the vitals of the constitution, and loaded the author with the most opprobrious epithets. So universal was the detestation of the principles contained in this performance, that it was judged requisite in order to appease the public, formally to vote it a libel on the constitution, and to direct the Attorney-General to prosecute the author.

Mr. Sheridan asserted, that if the house entertained a wish not to calumniate the societies, they would immediately accede to the hearing of evidence. Hitherto the proceedings had been founded upon false facts. It had fallen in his way to know that the noble Lord (Mornington) had been egregiously deceived, and that charges and assertions had been made which could not be proved. He had reason to know that Citizen Lee was not printer or publisher to the society, and that no hand-bills, containing the doctrine of King-killing, had been circulated by their order. Another society, called the Friends of Freedom, had branched from the London Corresponding Society. A member of that society was suspected of being a spy. At one of the meetings he said he had something to propose—the lights were extinguished, and several of these hand-bills were thrown about the room. As soon as they were discovered, the meeting took measures to discover the person who had scattered them; and they did not separate until they had come to a strong resolution against the hand-bills. Was it then fit that the house should, on mere unsupported assertions, proceed to strike so deadly a blow at the most valuable liberties of the people? Gentlemen would do well to pause, and to consider the strong facts urged by Mr. Sturt in his speech—a speech which, though not couched in so measured a strain of eloquence as he had heard, still contained excellent sense. In that speech a charge had been brought forward, surely of no light kind. Was it a light thing that a man in the pay of government

should publish so atrocious a libel upon the house of commons?—Was such a libel only to be laughed at?—And this was the calamitous state of affairs, that there was the most marked partiality shewn by government to their own adherents. When it suited their purposes to encourage massacre and bloodshed, they did encourage it. He alluded to the transactions of 1791. He complained of the total want of activity against the church and King mobs—he complained of the libels circulated against the dissenters of that time—Where had been the activity of government then? For his own part he was not in the habit of advising prosecutions for libels, but there was the pamphlet alluded to, and a work of Mr. Arthur Young's, which contained more atrocious libels than any of which government complained.

Mr. Pitt said, he did not mean to argue upon any of the sentiments contained in the pamphlet; the leading consideration was, whether it was a breach of privilege or not? and, if it was, he thought, instead of recommending the Attorney-General to prosecute, the house should vindicate its privileges by acts of its own. However, he was at present for passing to the order of the day. He afterwards said that no complaint of breach of privilege had been made. There could be no doubt of the order which the rules of the house authorised where such a complaint it formally stated; but, as the customary mode of introducing the subject had been neglected, it ought not be taken up in preference to the order of the day.

Mr. Sheridan said, it was easy to get rid of the dilemma which the right honorable gentleman had made out. In order, therefore, to remove the punctilio devised by the political special pleader, he would now comply with the forms of the house, and move that the particular passage be taken down; which being done, he urged the propriety of an immediate discussion. He quoted another sentence or two from the pamphlet, and said that he would not advert to the outrage which the passage also reflected against the lords, but leave them to assert their own dignity; nor would he insult the feelings or the understanding of the house, by enlarging

upon the atrocity of the outrage, as if any thing were necessary to convey to their mind a proper sense of its magnitude.

The question being put for the reading of the pamphlet and agreed to without a division,

Mr. Sheridan said, the house had now heard the whole of a pamphlet, which he had originally, from the extract quoted by his honorable friend, condemned in its principle and tendency—it was now to be admitted upon full proof to be the falsest, foulest, dullest, and most malicious pamphlet that had ever issued from a prostituted press. He trusted, that it would be a future lesson to gentlemen, on the other side the house, how they rashly vindicated, explained, or adopted the principles of a man, who circulated such libels against the constitution of the country. But it was with peculiar concern he saw the adoption of those principles by the right honorable gentleman, who had formerly, with his great eloquence, and various acquirements, adorned that side of the house, because the public, from the recollection of the sentiments of liberty he had then uttered, and with so great effect maintained, could not fail in his present apostacy to infer, that his former life had been governed by the impulse of interested hypocrisy.—He said, gentlemen required time to deliberate; that he would not press any motion upon them. Doubts indeed had been started, whether this man were of importance enough to attract and call for the weighty and immediate notice of that house; but they should consider, that this person was the main agent and propagator, the instigator and abettor of all those unconstitutional assemblies, which, upon French principles, had invaded the country. He considered him however as too despicable for that species of trial which Sacheverell, whose works contained no principles more detestable, had suffered. He would not insult their understandings by a detail of the book, every page of which betrayed the true sentiments of the author,

and added to the original atrocity of the libel. He concluded with moving "That the said pamphlet is a malicious, scandalous, and seditious libel, containing matter tending to create jealousies and divisions among His Majesty's subjects, to alienate their affections from our present form of government as established in King, Lords, and Commons, and to subvert the true principles of our free constitution; and that the said pamphlet is a high breach of the privileges of this house.

The Attorney-General could not, he said, solemnly deliver his opinion now whether the pamphlet was or was not a libel; but he would make himself master on the subject, and thought there could be no difficulty in preparing gentlemen to decide as it became legislators on Thursday.

Mr. Sheridan said, he was ready to decline pressing for hasty decision, and even to give time for the longest delay. When the honorable and learned gentleman professed so much anxiety to set at rest the public mind, by a speedy discussion of the bills, it was not from any fair and honest motive to allay any agitation which might arise in the country from a difference of sentiment, but in order to prevent the manifestation of the public mind, with respect to those bills.

The question for adjourning the consideration of the pamphlet till Thursday, passed without a division.—Mr. Pitt then moved, "that the committee on the bills should be postponed till Wednesday."—Mr. Fox moved an amendment, postponing it till this day se'nnight.

Mr. Alderman Newnham said, that gentlemen seemed to take it for granted that at the public meetings there had been nothing but cool deliberate discussion. With respect to the Common Hall, the crowd was so great, the clamour so incessant, that it was impossible to decide what were the sentiments of the majority. Many had assented to the proceedings, without ever knowing what were the resolutions for which they voted. Guildhall, it was well known, was a long building: his voice could not reach above half its extent, and when he attempted to speak, they would not hear him: nay, even his own constituents would not hear Mr. Lushington, who is so able a speaker. The same riotous conduct had taken place at the Middlesex meeting, where Mr. Mainwaring had to complain of a similar want of attention.

Mr. Sheridan replied, that in each of these cases the opinion of the people had been fully manifested. The decision of the Westminster meeting had been confirmed by the parochial meetings which had since been held; and he was confident that the decision of the Common Hall would be equally established by the opinion of the several wards. With respect to what he had stated, that certain gentlemen had not been heard, he might refer the worthy alderman for an answer to the right honorable gentleman, who, in 1784, had stated to his right honorable friend (Mr. Fox) what must be his situation of degradation with regard to his constituents, when they refused to listen to his sentiments. He remarked that the right honorable Secretary at War (Mr. Windham) had that day distinguished himself in a manner which would not soon be forgotten, and he trusted would not easily be forgiven. He had said that his right honorable friend had not, by his explanation, retracted his original declaration. Did he expect him to quibble, prevaricate, and shuffle, like some other right honorable gentlemen? He ought to have known him better. He might have expected, from the candor and manliness of his nature, that he would repeat without shrinking his original declaration. The right honorable Secretary at War called for a rigor beyond the law. When such language was adopted in that house, it might be a question how long the freedom of discussion might be suffered to remain. His apprehension of such a catastrophe was increased, when he understood that the right honorable gentleman had converted the metropolis into a garrison; that the soldiers were ordered to sleep all night at the feet of their horses, with one foot in the stirrup, ready to be called at a moment's warning. The Secretary at War, said Mr. Sheridan, arraigns my right honorable friend, when he talks of resistance. But if he does not regard us as hypocrites, what other language should we use? We tell the country, that

if these bills pass, the constitution is lost! Here Mr. Sheridan repeated what Mr. Fox had stated, with respect to resistance. If a degraded and oppressed majority of the people applied to him, he would advise them to acquiesce in those bills, only as long as resistance was imprudent. They had affirmed that these bills went directly to overturn the constitution; if they were sincere in that language, what other answer could they give to the people than that which they now avowed? What contemptible wretches must they be, if, while under the shelter of their privilege, they professed the measures to be calculated to overturn the constitution, and infringe the Bill of Rights, they shrunk back on such an occasion, from stating that which they conceived to be the undoubted right of the subject, to resist oppression, when all legal means of redress were refused. Good God, what a situation were they reduced to! A corrupt majority was to pass these bills, which were a part of all revolutionary government—A system of terror was begun, and they were to be trampled under feet of a British Robespierre—(a cry of hear him! hear him! from the ministerial side of the house) yes, said Mr. Sheridan, the resemblance is too striking to be overlooked. Robespierre, to maintain his authority, kept the people in incessant alarm about plots and conspiracies, which were necessary to him to bind the nation in stronger shackles—Robespierre could not visit the Mayor of Paris without his body guard, and Robespierre put the whole country under military execution, under the pretext of security to the constitution. The tyrant, however, could not long practise these arts with impunity. A whole people could not long endure a slavery so detestable from a hand so worthless. The declaration of Mr. Fox he implicitly subscribed. It must be the feeling of every true Englishman; or every man who acknowledged the principles which seated the illustrious family of Brunswick on the throne. His right

honorable friend had said, that if the people of England were so dead to all their former feelings, that they wished for these bills, then he was no longer a fit servant for such a people; and he had no occasion to have made that declaration; they did, and must, know the frame and texture of his soul could never suffer him to be the servant of slaves, as they must be if these bills passed into laws. Mr. Sheridan concluded, I still hope, that the principles of the constitution are too deeply graven on the hearts of Englishmen to be erased by any seducement, and still less by any system of intimidation. The times are critical, no doubt, but there is, I trust, in the country, a sense and spirit in the people which will rise and prove equal to the occasion.

Mr. Fox's amendment was negatived without a division.

NOVEMBER 24.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

MR. SHERIDAN took notice of the charge which had been made of misrepresentation on the part of those who oppose the bills now before the house. He observed, that the minister complained of the speeches which had been made upon them. He had complained, that gentlemen who opposed him stated, that these bills did not leave to the people the right of petitioning; that they said that all meetings for that purpose had been done away. They had never said so; they had only said that the effect wished from meetings on political subjects would be done away; for if any meeting took place, it was in the power of two magistrates to dissolve these meetings at their discretion. Any meetings on the questions of war or peace; on the conduct of the minister; on the miscarriages of his plans; on the nature of his projects, and on all points for which the opinion of the public could be useful in being made

known to that house, would be done away by these bills. For, on all these points, one of the bills gave to the magistrates the power, not indeed of preventing meetings, but of dissolving them at pleasure, under a pretence that the proceedings of the meetings, in the judgment of such magistrate, tended to sedition. But it was said, that this bill allowed the people to assemble without any restraint, to discuss the merits of any depending law. This did not appear to him to be any very valuable exception, for after the passing of the bill, it would be of very little consequence what law was afterwards proposed; indeed, the minister need not propose any other, for the moment this was passed, he would have established a complete despotism. It would be impossible for the people to utter a single word, on points the most essential to their rights, that were not agreeable to the justices, who were to attend these meetings. This might, and most probably would be done, if any number of persons met for the purpose of obtaining a parliamentary reform, in the manner recommended some years ago by the minister himself. But as the minister had complained of the effect of misrepresentation on the subject of these bills, he would ask, whether he might not retort upon that charge? Here Mr. Sheridan alluded to the conduct of the minister and his friends, against the bill brought in by Mr. Fox, relative to the affairs of India. He wished to remind the house, how the author of that bill had been misrepresented upon that occasion, by those who supported the present minister at that time; complaints of misrepresentation came not with the best grace from that quarter. Having made many observations on this point, he proceeded to observe on the effect which opposition to these bills had produced on the mind of the minister. It had already made him determine to lower his views, and this was evident from his having, to-night, elevated his voice, for that was a pretty general indication on which the

house might rely. Strangers who heard the right honorable gentleman to-night, might think from his tone that he was more than ever determined to pursue his plan with vigor, but those who had heard him often, and who knew him better, drew from that circumstance a contrary conclusion. They know that in proportion as he was lofty in his manner, he was sinking in his intention, and therefore, he for one, should not now object to attending the discussion of the provisions of this bill in a committee, if to a committee it was to go, in order to see what sort of a thing the bill was intended to be at last. He should not object, he said, to attending to this, unless the minister should be unwilling that any of his opponents should be witnesses of his degradation. Mr. Sheridan proceeded to take notice of an argument that had been often used with regard to the degree of weight and credit that was due to petitions from the people, and what was or was not to be considered as the voice of the people. He was sorry that a right honorable gentleman (Mr. Dundas) was not now in that house; he heard that minister say, that this bill ought not to pass, unless the sense of the people was clearly in its favour; he only wanted this declaration to be adhered to—and if it was, he was confident this bill would never pass into a law. Upon this part of the subject he alluded to the many petitions which already had been brought in, and argued, that time ought to be given, in order that the house might see how many would be brought on both sides of the question; and he was confident, in that case, the real sense of the people would soon put an end to these measures. He should himself present a petition from the ward of Farringdon-without, signed by 1700 persons, who, as he understood, made up one-sixth of the whole city of London, and many other members had petitions from numerous bodies of men from different parts of the kingdom. He said this, because he had heard from some worthy magistrates, that a

great number of petitions would come from the most respectable housekeepers in the kingdom, in favor of the said bills; and there he could not help observing on what had fallen from a worthy magistrate of the city of London (Sir B. Hammett,) who had said, as well might these bills be said to be an infringement on the right of petition, as that hanging a man for forgery was an infringement on writing. Had that worthy magistrate talked of the abuse of franking, he might have been listened to with more attention, for it was a subject on which he had some experience. Mr. Sheridan then took notice of what had been said by a worthy Alderman (Lushington,) who had introduced a topic, which he thought ought to be deprecated in that house, because it might lead to bad consequences; —he meant that of making a distinction between petitioners on account of the weight which was due to property; and it was property, and not numbers, which gave weight to petitions. This was a bad principle to be dwelt upon in the discussion of petitions in that house, nor was it universally followed by those who were the most ready to introduce it. He should be glad to know whether the honorable gentleman (Mr. Mainwarren,) who had complained of the treatment he met with at the meeting of the county of Middlesex, whether, if the case had been reversed there, that he had been joined by the company at large, and the noblemen who attended, had been against him, and the company in their sentiments, he would then have said any thing on the subject of property? In short, these distinctions between wealth and indigence in considering the merits of petitions, were bad. To cry up the consequence of property against numbers, or to make a distinction between the owner of land, and the industry and labour of those who render it fertile, was a bad policy in that house, when any appeal was made to its justice in the form of petition.

Mr. Ryder brought in a bill for preventing the obstruction to a free passage of grain throughout the kingdom, under the penalty of being kept to hard labor for a time to be agreed on in the committee. The bill was read a first time, and on the motion for the second reading—

Mr. Sheridan said, this bill might be a proper measure, but he did not like the increase of new penalties, as the existing laws appeared to him sufficient. He therefore moved that the bill be printed, in order to give the members opportunity to deliberate upon it.

Mr. Ryder was not surprised at the jealousy of the honorable gentleman, upon any measure which tended to prevent tumultuous assemblies, but begged leave to inform him, that the existing laws were deemed inadequate, because it was uncertain whether they could apply precisely to the prevention of the obstruction to a free passage of grain within the kingdom, being enacted against obstructions to the exportation of it.

Mr. Sheridan asserted that, notwithstanding the sarcasm of the right honorable gentleman, he had a right to be jealous of every measure which tended to increase the penalties of the statutes, and that this right is constitutional. He again repeated that he believed the laws sufficient to prevent any man, or body of men, from obstructing the passage of grain, especially if they proceeded to break open the sacks and steal the flour from them.

The bill was ordered to be printed, and read a second time on Monday.

Mr. Sheridan presented a petition against the convention bills from a numerous body of associated artizans, consisting of hatters, weavers, cordwainers, bookbinders, printers, carpenters, joiners, smiths, &c. &c. to the number of 15,000. He next presented a petition of a similar nature, from the friendly society of working bakers, to the number of 1000. The right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had asserted that the friendly societies would not be affected by these bills, if they passed into a law; but Mr. Sheridan suspected when that part

of the bill had been discussed, the right honorable gentleman would be convinced that he had been mistaken.

Mr. Sheridan then presented a petition against the bills from 4000 of the inhabitants of Birmingham. Had not the petitioners been pressed for time, it would have had an astonishing number of more signatures. Such too was the situation of the people who signed this petition, that in consequence of some ministerial manoeuvre, they were denied a public meeting, for no newspaper would publish an advertisement to call a public meeting; nor was a single hand-bill suffered to be circulated for that purpose. Yet, notwithstanding these discouragements, in a day or two had 4000 signatures been subscribed.

Sir Edward Knatchbull did not rise to oppose the motion for the petition to lie upon the table, but to caution the house how it accepted that petition as the sense of the inhabitants of Birmingham. He was induced to this caution by a petition which lay upon the table of the house, and was presented in his absence by his honorable colleague (Mr. Honeywood,) which was stated to be the petition of the mayor, recorder, freemen, and inhabitants of the city of Rochester. It was signed by 1,500 persons, among whose names there were not more than 150 names of freemen, though Rochester contains 700 freemen, and between thirty and forty thousand inhabitants. He did not mean to cast any reflection on the persons who signed the petition, but he knew there were numbers who did not know what they signed. At the same time he had to observe, that the conduct of the chief magistrate of that city, was reprehensible in suffering a procession at the same time, which was a disgrace to the city, wherein the effigy of a reverend and respectable bishop was carried about the town, and afterwards burnt.

Mr. Sheridan reminded the house, that he had stated the petition to be signed by 4,000 inhabitants of Birmingham, and consequently no man who knew the immense population of that town, could imagine it was signed by the majority. If he had brought the letter which he received from a respectable gentleman of that town with the petition, he could have mentioned more precisely the reason why a greater number of signatures were not ob-

tained. One cause was, the rapidity with which the bills were pressed; another was, that an attempt had been made by the opposite party to promote violence if the meeting was called; and a third, and a very obvious reason was that which he stated, that no advertisement had been published, and no hand-bills permitted to be circulated about the town. Thus the people were deprived of the means of a public meeting.—And now he would say a word or two upon the Rochester tale, which, if the case had permitted, would have come with a better grace, so far as merely related to the name, from the neighbouring city of Canterbury, as it was of that species which is commonly called a Canterbury tale. He must remark, that it did not at all apply to the petition which he had just before presented from Birmingham; and, as he was about to present a petition from Warwick, he thought it had better be repeated, or some such ridiculous story substituted, since it would apply equally as well to Warwick as to Birmingham. He conceived the story was not at all entitled to credit, so far as it involved the persons who subscribed to the petition. He deprecated the circumstance, so far as it related to a reverend prelate, but suspected it had arisen from a statement in the public papers, which he hoped was a misrepresentation (as he could not for a moment imagine any learned and dignified person could be so indiscreet, and so ignorant of the principles of our constitution to say,) “The mass of the people had nothing to do with the laws but to obey them!”

Sir Edward Knatchbull explained again that he did not mean to throw any reflection on the persons who signed the petition, but he thought the mayor reprehensible in suffering the procession.

Mr. Sheridan observed, this was an extraordinary explanation. for all he could understand by it was, that the honorable baronet thought there was no

harm to burn a bishop, and therefore did not mean to reflect on the persons who permitted it, or else there was harm, and those persons who permitted the act were implicated in it.

Mr. Sheridan presented two petitions from Warwick against the bills. As some stress had been laid by some gentleman upon the respectability of the persons who signed the petition, he would state the first person who had signed these petitions was Lord Dormer; the third name was the name of a man, who, though no bishop, was, by his unrivalled worth, and his unrivalled learning, entitled to the respect and esteem of every person—he meant Dr. Samuel Parr.

Mr Sheridan next presented a petition against the bills, from the inhabitants of Kilmalnock. Notwithstanding the people of Scotland were restrained from a free declaration of their opinions, he had an opportunity of knowing the sentiments of many of them ever since he had the honor of bringing forward a motion relative to the royal boroughs; and he could positively assert, there never was a time when the people there were more dissatisfied than at present. It was, indeed, a sullen and silent dissatisfaction, from which, the right honorable gentleman opposite might argue approbation. But, he remarked, they are the more to be dreaded, because oppression kept it silent; but they are as far from being satisfied as the man who should be stunned by a violent blow, and should then be said to express no dissatisfaction.

Mr. Sheridan presented a petition from the inhabitants of Douse in Scotland, against the bills.

NOVEMBER 26.

LIBEL ON THE CONSTITUTION.

Mr. Sheridan moved the order of the day; which being read, for the resumed debate on the libel on the constitution,

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that though this was only a resumed debate, as he had troubled the house very shortly on the former occasion, he should again solicit their indulgence a little more at length; and this he should do perfectly consistent with order, as he meant to move an amendment to his former motion. Though the most part of the time, since the libel had been read, had been occupied with the business of the house, he had again read it carefully over. If the part which had chiefly been referred to had been found to be only a solitary passage, if there had appeared better doctrines in other parts of the work, and if the whole had not formed a most audacious libel on the constitution, he would have been less disposed to have pushed the present proceeding. The whole seemed to be the result of settled malignity, and a deliberate attack on the most sacred rights of the constitution, systematically conducted, and supported by powerful means of giving effect to the hostile intentions of the parties concerned in that attack. He was surprised to hear a right honorable gentleman (Mr. Windham), on the night that the pamphlet was read, declare, that the exceptionable passage was perfectly innocent, a declaration which implicated that right honorable gentleman in the doctrines which were there avowed. Mr. Windham just entered at that moment, when Mr. Sheridan said, that he hoped he had re-considered the subject, and was no longer disposed to support such abominable doctrines, as were maintained in that pamphlet. He must again repeat, that what chiefly induced him to call the attention

that it seemed to be connected with means of the most extensive circulation. He was most strongly disposed to press the subject, because the publication was ascribed to Mr. Reeves, the chairman of the Loyal Association at the Crown and Anchor, the fruitful source of those numerous associations which sprung up in the country during the influence of alarm; and a man whom the right honorable Secretary at War had described as entitled to the national gratitude, on account of his exertions in the service of the public. He understood, by the imputation, that he was the author, and was this night to be disavowed, in a very solemn manner. He should be happy that this was the case, as he had formerly the pleasure of knowing the gentleman, when he was a member of the Whig Club. But it would be completely satisfactory to assert, that he had no share in penning the work; in order to exculpate him from the charge of having approved the doctrines which it contained, it would be necessary to prove that he had no connection in putting it into circulation, from the funds of an association paid by government, or at least, supported by the subscriptions of persons in office. The whole work breathed the same spirit of hostility to the constitution.—Among other extraordinary positions it contained the following: “That all liberty is derived from the throne; that all security for the rights of the subjects flows from the same quarter; that the revolution in 1688 was a mockery and a farce; that the dissenters are a pestilent and a factious race, who never will be at peace, while they are suffered to exist; that all whigs are in their hearts republicans, watching every opportunity to overturn the constitution; that a constitutional lawyer is either a knave or a fool; that the decision of juries ought to have no weight; and, last of all, that the lords and commons may be lopt off from the constitution, and the monarchy go on in all its functions.”

Mr. Sheridan then proceeded to read some ex-

tracts. He adverted to the history which the author had given of the reformation, which he ascribed, from the beginning, to French principles, as the first reformers were Frenchmen. So that we had now discovered a new evil, though rather of old date, which might be traced to the effect of French principles; namely, all the calamities which had followed from the reformation. The author, who did not seem very partial to the sects, who arose in consequence of the reformation, in particular, gave no quarter to the Dissenters: he treated them all as a set of Maroons and Charibs, fit only to be exterminated. Talking of the revolution in 1688, his expressions were, "It has been vulgarly called the revolution; upon what authority I know not; it was not so named by parliament, nor is it a term known to our laws." He was surprised how this bold and ignorant author should dare to treat with contempt that glorious event, which secured the liberties of Englishmen, and which was recognized in the statutes by that name. He would find the name employed in the proceedings on the trial of Dr. Sacheverel, to which he might in all probability have shortly occasion to refer. He had farther insinuated, "that so much commemoration of the revolution cannot sound agreeably in the ears of the present Sovereign."—What an outrage to His Majesty! that an event could not sound agreeably in his ears, which seated his family on the throne! "But what manner of men," says the author, "must they be, who make this a subject for tavern meetings, for congratulation, and for frivolous festivity! A subject to declaim, to combine, to run stark mad upon! However, they know their meaning, and there are very few of us who do not know their meaning also. All this wondrous passion is excited by the idea of a revolution; what they idolize is a revolution in the abstract, and these revolutionary principles are the only ideas they profess of our constitution." With respect to any form of government, established at

the revolution, that was a thing utterly unknown. "The government, we know," says the author, "and the laws we know—but the constitution we know not. It is an unknown region, that has never been visited but by dreamers and men who see visions; and the reports they make are so contradictory, that no one relies on them." After a great deal of scurrility against the whigs, the author adverts to the gentlemen who were tried on a charge of high treason, and acquitted. "The designs of these democrats have been fully exposed to the public view, on the late trials of some of them last year for high treason; they were then acquitted by a jury, but they have since been found guilty by their country." But this sentiment he accompanied with others, of which the following passage would afford a specimen. "What disappointment and discomfiture it must be to these idolizers of the constitution, supposed to be established at the revolution, to discover at length that they have bestowed their applause and affection upon the shreds and patches of old date; and that if they had lived in those wicked reigns of Charles II. and James, they would have enjoyed in theory, though not in practice, as good a constitution as they have had since, with the single exception of a Protestant King." Mr. Sheridan proceeded to read some other passages in the same strain, commenting upon them as he went along, and concluded, that as the pamphlet abounded only with passages of this kind, any farther examination of its contents would be unnecessary. In the outset of his speech, he mentioned, that his attention had chiefly been called to the subject, because the pamphlet now before the house appeared to him not merely to be the effort of individual malice, but to be part of a deliberate and settled system of attack carried on against the constitution, conducted by regular approaches, supported by powerful means, and branching into extensive ramifications. This conspiracy had been going on for some years, during

which, no expense or activity had been spared in the circulation of pamphlets. It was not in this pamphlet alone that such doctrines were preached. They had been circulated two years ago, by Mr. Reeves, in another pamphlet, entitled, "The Example of France, a Warning to Britain," written by Arthur Young, Esq.; to which we find affixed, a letter, dated from the Crown and Ancior committee room, March 18, 1793, signed John Reeves, Chairman, communicating a resolution of thanks, for the excellent performance to which they wished to call the public attention, as it is a work that cannot fail of making a great impression on all who read it. In this pamphlet by Mr. Young, continued Mr. Sheridan, we find the same doctrines, and nearly the same expressions, with those of which we complain in the pamphlet supposed to be written by Mr. Reeves. It maintains, that "Those who assert the King and nobility of England were made for the people, do not seem to have any just recollection of that which made the people of England; such has been the fostering and paternal tenderness of this government, that the constitution of England formed by the crown and nobility, may with great truth be said to have produced the people."

Here we find, said Mr. Sheridan, the people of England to have been produced in consequence of a marriage between the crown and nobility. "Beyond all doubt, the crown and the nobility made the the constitution, and the people, properly so called, never thoroughly interfered on their own account, but to destroy it. The crown and the barons laid the foundation of that which, at the revolution, was by the nobility matured into the present constitution.—What then can be so preposterous as to assert that the crown and the nobility were made for those who were created by their influence, who were fashioned by their hands?" In another part Mr. Young asserts, that, "The house of commons was not created by the people, but the crown; it

never did represent the people in any period of our history, and is not responsible to the people.”—These passages, said Mr. Sheridan, are the original from which those sentiments, of which we now complain, seem to be taken; for they maintain that the constitution is a thing made by the crown, and insinuate that the crown has a right to destroy it.—Mr. Reeves, assuming him to be the author, tells us in his pamphlet, “That the lords and commons derive their origin and nutriment from the crown.” By these words “origin and nutriment,” we must suppose he means that the King makes all the peers, and pensions the greater part of the commons. But Mr. Young, who is so partial to the crown, does not neglect also to give a boon to another of the legislature. He exempts the members of the house of commons from all responsibility with respect to the people, and thus frees their shoulders from a most uneasy burden.—But other passages in Mr. Young’s book are still more curious, and still greater libels on the British constitution. He says, “to call the house of commons the representatives of the people is a very inaccurate mode of expression; they ought never to be called by any other name than the house of commons, to distinguish them from the house of lords. If they really were the representatives of the people, they might in theory be good, or better; but they would be something else than what they are. But reformers say, they are corrupted and bribed. If they are bribed, in order to act wisely, it is an argument against you. If the nature of such an assembly demands to be corrupted, in order to procure the public good, who, but a visionary, can wish to remove corruption? Government, certainly, would have been carried on cheaper, if honesty alone had induced the house of commons to act, as corruption has induced them.” “An equal representation, rotten boroughs, long parliaments, extravagant courts, selfish ministers, and corrupt majorities, are so intimately interwoven

with our practical freedom, that it would require better political anatomists than our modern reformers, to shew, on fact, that we did not owe our liberty to the identical evils which they want to expunge.” —What a shocking recital, said Mr. Sheridan, and how abominable the conclusion he has drawn ! If such indeed, be a just account of the state of things, I would rather agree with Mr. Reeves, that the corrupt branches ought to be lopt off, than subscribe to that infamous proposition, that to this very source of corruption we are to trace all our blessings.—Speaking of a parliamentary reform, he says, “ I know well the result, corruption would be banished the constitution.” “ In comparing the constitution to a machine that has gone well for an hundred years, perhaps, it is indifferent whether influence (which these reformers call corruption) be termed the dust or the oil of the machine ; for if it has gone well for a century, and seems, while certain wheels are half covered with dust, to go better than formerly, I would no more allow the dust to be brushed away, than I would allow the oil to be removed. Influence, however, is not the dust, but the oil of the machine ; the constitution never went for a moment without influence” (meaning, said Mr. Sheridan, corruption) ; “ and to remove it would be taking away the oil which has given a century of smoothness.” But now Mr. Young, who, a few years ago was a violent reformer, and even an advocate for what is called French principles, has obtained a salary or pension of 400*l.* per annum under government, and having greased his pen with the oil of corruption, which he calls influence, he has discovered that it is essentially necessary to the welfare of the constitution.—When I mentioned that these infamous productions had means of extensive circulation, it may not be improper for me to explain, that the political essays of Mr. Young are printed at the same office, and conveyed into the country through the same channel as the reports and papers

of the board of agriculture. Mr. Sheridan concluded, never was there any country in which there was so much absence of public principle, and at the same time so many instances of private worth. Never was there so much charity and humanity towards the poor and the distressed ; any act of cruelty or oppression never failed to excite a sentiment of general indignation against its authors. It was a circumstance peculiarly strange, that though luxury had arrived to such a pitch, it had so little effect in depraving the hearts and destroying the morals of people in private life, and almost every day produced some fresh example of generous feelings and noble exertions of benevolence. Yet, amidst these phenomena of private virtue, it was to be remarked, that there was an almost total want of public spirit, and a most deplorable contempt of public principle. To what could this be ascribed, but to the circulation of those libellous pamphlets, the prevalence of those abominable doctrines, which represented public corruption and profligacy as necessary parts of our constitution, as the security for its continuance, and the source of its blessings ?—Such doctrines, however, could not fail to have the most fatal effects, and from the alarming symptoms of the times, there was but too much reason to fear that these would be speedily experienced in their utmost extent.—When Great Britain fell, the case would not be with her, as with Rome in former times. When Rome fell, she fell by the weight of her own vices. The inhabitants were so corrupted and degraded, as to be unworthy of a continuance of prosperity, and incapable to enjoy the blessings of liberty ; their minds were bent to the state in which a reverse of fortune placed them. But when Great Britain falls, she will fall with a people full of private worth and virtue : she will be ruined by the profligacy of the governors, and the security of her inhabitants—the consequence of those pernicious doctrines which have taught her to place a false confidence in her

strength and freedom, and not to look with distrust and apprehension to the misconduct and corruption of those to whom she has trusted the management of her resources. She will exhibit for a time the fallacious appearance of health and vigor, but the cause of her decay is within herself. The worm, corruption, will eat into her heart, and consume her existence. If gentlemen, then, wish to avert the period of her destruction, let them oppose the progress of those pernicious doctrines, which are the source of the evil. Mr. Sheridan said, he was not sure what mode of proceeding he should propose to the house to adopt. He should now, however, move an amendment to his motion, the words of which were taken from the proceedings on Sacheverel's trial, and sure he was, that none of the libels on that occasion were equal in point of settled malignity and dangerous tendency, to that which was now submitted for the consideration of the house.

The following is the original motion, "That the said pamphlet is a malicious, scandalous, and seditious libel, containing matter tending to create jealousies and divisions among His Majesty's loyal subjects; to alienate their affections from our present happy form of government, as established in King, lords, and commons; and to subvert the true principles of our free constitution; and that the said pamphlet is a high breach of the privileges of this house."

The words which he moved, as an amendment to his motion, were these, that after the word "libel," there be inserted—"Reflecting on the late glorious Revolution."

Sir John Sinclair vindicated the board of agriculture; he declared that no political discussions ever took place there; nor was their Secretary (Mr. A. Young) ever employed by the board in the circulation of political pamphlets.

Mr. Sheridan acknowledged the utility of that institution, but repeated, that Mr. A. Young had a

salary or pension from the crown as its Secretary, and that persons who were employed by him in circulating agricultural reports, also conveyed through the country his political productions; the honorable gentleman who spoke last, would probably not think that these pamphlets tended much to improve the state of the country.

The original motion was put and carried, with only two dissenting voices; Mr. Sheridan having, with the leave of the house, withdrawn his amendment, as to its being a libel on the revolution.

Mr. Sheridan congratulated the house on the unanimity with which the resolution had been adopted, for, except the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Windham) and his convert (Sir W. Dolben), there was not one voice against it. He would give the right honorable gentleman all the benefit of his alliance, and call the attention of the house to the next step. The house now having adopted his motion, it was proper that some proceedings should be grounded upon it, and that it should not be suffered to stand by itself on their journals. He had been made more anxious in pushing this proceeding, because, as he had before stated, he did not consider the publication to be a solitary libel, but to have issued from a quarter possessing extensive means of circulating attacks against the constitution. He stated the various modes of proceeding that might be adopted, and referred to precedents in former times. At a period when party ran very high, a pamphlet of Dr. Swift's (on the conduct of the allies) a very innocent and useful work, was ordered by the house to be burnt by the hands of the hangman. Mr. Sheridan said, that under the circumstances of the present case, what he considered to be of most importance was to come at the person of the author. He had reason to believe that Mr. Reeves was the author, and since he came into the house he had been confirmed in his belief. He had been given to understand that a formal disavowal would

be made of the fact, but he considered that which had been made by the Secretary at War to be by no means sufficiently precise or satisfactory. He had great objections to instituting any oppressive prosecutions against a poor printer or publisher, who looked for security to the character of his employer, and could have no idea that he would receive any thing of a libellous or unconstitutional tendency from the chairman of a loyal association. In order that proper steps might be taken to come at the person of the author, a power which Mr. Sheridan conceived that the house ought not to delegate out of their own hands, he would adopt a precedent of 1707, and concluded with moving, "That it be referred to a committee to enquire who was the author of the libel."

This motion was also carried.

NOVEMBER 27.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

Mr. SHERIDAN presented a petition from his own constituents, the inhabitants of Stafford, against the bills. He had a general recollection of their names, and from the signatures, he was sure that the petition contained the general sense of the inhabitants.

Mr. Sheridan next presented a petition against the bill from the gentlemen and burgesses of Newcastle under Lime, where the mayor was not averse to the petition, nor was there one person in the town dissenting from it. As the petition, therefore passed unanimously, and both the representatives of the town were adverse to it, Mr. Sheridan said, the inhabitants had done him the honor to commit it to his care.

Mr. Sheridan next presented a petition against the bills, from a number of mechanics, who had not

an opportunity of signing that petition from the associated tradesmen. To those 15,000 names, therefore, might be added the 832, affixed to this petition. It came from the journeymen gun-makers, which of course, he said, the gentlemen on the opposite side would deem very alarming!

Sir John Frederick presented a petition from the clergy, freeholders, and inhabitants of the county of Surrey, signed by two hundred persons.

Mr. Sheridan observed, that this petition was a strong censure upon the bills; for though the petitioners stated, that they understood some acts were at present under the consideration of parliament, the purpose of which they evidently knew, as appeared by the subsequent part of the petition, they requested remedy for the evils of which they complained, without destroying the liberties of the people, or intrenching upon the right of petitioning, and the free exercise of speech.

Mr. William Smith presented a petition against the bills from the inhabitants of Aldersgate ward. It complained of the conduct of Alderman Anderson, who resided in that ward, and refused to convene a meeting of the inhabitants to consider the two bills in question.

Mr. Alderman Anderson justified himself by saying, that he had lived long in the ward, and had an opportunity of knowing most of the inhabitants; out of thirty-one who signed the requisition, he did not know more than four or five. As the purport of the bills also had been amply discussed before by the representatives of the ward in the common council, he thought it unnecessary to consult the inhabitants, and told the persons so who waited on him for that purpose, and they replied, that they were more anxious to do it, because Mr. Pitt had been minister for a great many years, and they thought it was now high time for Mr. Fox to be so.—[A loud laugh.]

Mr. Sheridan could not suffer such levity to gloss over the conduct of the honorable gentleman, who, however long his residence might have been in the ward, or however universal his acquaintance with the inhabitants, was compelled by duty, on receiving a requisition of that nature, to inquire who the persons were who signed it? and not to refuse their

request, because he had no personal acquaintance with them. The honorable gentleman had refused it also, because the representatives of the ward in common council had already discussed the tendency of the bills, and delivered their opinions on them; but what kind of reasoning was this, and how would it apply to that house, if because the representatives of the people may have happened to have passed a law, which, for argument's sake, may be supposed directly opposite to the interests, happiness, and prosperity of the kingdom, the people are no longer to have an opinion about it? He subscribed to the declaration of his honorable friend (Mr. Smith), that such proceedings were the strongest arguments that could be used against the bills, and quoted the instance, not only of the high sheriff of York, but of Northumberland also; and asked whether, after the bills have passed, they or the honorable gentleman would think it their duty to attend that public meeting which they had refused to call? He fairly quoted these as instances of the abuses which were likely to follow the passing of the bills; and observed, that it was remarkable when one magistrate (Mr. Le Mesurier) stated a common hall to be an improper mode of obtaining the sense of the people, and that there could be no appeal but to the decision of the several wards, that now the requisition for making that appeal should not be allowed. But as the public meeting at Westminster, so did the common hall of London, express the general sense of the people; and it was not only confirmed by that petition, signed by 200 inhabitants of one ward, and the petition he had presented, signed by 1700 inhabitants of the ward of Farringdon Without, but he trusted it would be confirmed by every other ward in the ratio of five to one.

Mr. Sheridan presented a petition from 1,200 of the inhabitants of Clerkenwell, which was signed in twelve hours against the bills; and if there had been more time, there would have been a much greater

number, but they acted under the same impression with many other people, that if the petition was not immediately presented, it could not be received at all.

Mr. Sheridan said, that it was found extremely difficult to proceed with proper dispatch in the committee of enquiry, upon the pamphlet, entitled, "Thoughts on Government," on account of the slow and careful manner, he supposed, in which the gentlemen of that house ate their breakfast. He, therefore, moved, that the committee be extended, and that Mr. Howard, General Macleod, Mr. Lambton, Mr. Church, Mr. St. John, Mr. Hare, Sir William Milner, Mr. Maurice Robinson, Mr. Crespigny, &c. be added thereto.

The motion was put and carried, as was a motion "That it be an instruction to the committee to sit to-morrow." The house then resolved itself into a committee on the bill for preventing seditious meetings and assemblies.

Mr. Sheridan said, the purpose of his attending was not to propose any alterations in the bill, fully persuaded that no alteration, but negating each and every clause of it, could make it palatable to the majority of the people. He attended to watch some things which were going forward. The object of this bill was said to be to prevent seditious meetings, and tumultuous assemblies; and he was now convinced, more than ever, that this bill would not answer that purpose. It would not prevent the discussion of the question of peace and war; the conduct or capacity of ministers to carry on the war; neither would it give to ministers the security which they wanted, though this indeed was the very foundation of the bill, to which, for the purpose of deluding the people, they had given another title. It was calculated to give a security against any public deliberation of the people on the misconduct of ministers. By this bill 400,000 persons, or any number, might assemble and deliberate at Copen-

hagen house, or in an open field, and there they might canvass the question of war and peace; the whole conduct of ministers, and hold what language they pleased, whether temperate or intemperate, to recommend peace, or even to withhold supplies; and under the authority of this bill, no justice of peace would have any power to interfere with their proceedings, or to attempt to disperse, or even to interrupt their proceedings. Gentlemen might wonder how this could happen.—He would tell them:—By this bill any number of persons might meet for the purpose of examining and considering any depending law; this they could not avoid in the bill according to the principle on which its authors pretended to proceed. Every supply bill offered to that house, and scarce a week passed without such bills, was a depending law; and according to this act, the people might meet and discuss it; and under the discussion of a bill for granting a supply to His Majesty, they might discuss the whole conduct of the King's ministers, and whether they ought not to be removed from His Majesty's service. It was a bill rather to encourage and provoke, than to suppress tumultuous meetings and assemblies. He did not mention this in order that any new clause should be inserted, but to shew the inefficacy of the bill; and also by way of notice of what ground he should hereafter take when this bill came out of the committee, in order that there should be no color for saying hereafter that he took an unmanly part in the way he should oppose the bill in its future stages.

Mr. Pitt having replied to Mr. Sheridan,

Mr. Sheridan said, he was glad to hear the right honorable gentleman had taken what he said as a notice of what he should do hereafter upon this bill. He need not wonder he was now a little sneered at by that right honorable gentleman, about lending the aid of his abilities to any measure, for he had

been more than once reproached for having given himself so much trouble to mend so many of his bad bills. He seemed to forget the nature of the case now before parliament. Suppose Mr. Thellwall, or any other person, was to call a meeting at Copenhagen House, when a bill of supply was to be voted in parliament, and that instead of three there should be ten tribunes erected, from whence to harangue the populace, could any thing be more regular in the discussion of a supply bill, than to enter into the circumstances of the war, the distressed situation of the country, and the misconduct of ministers in the course of it: it was the constant course of debating in parliament. There was no ingenuity required upon the subject; the company so assembled would soon find out the incapacity and the tyrannical disposition of ministers; and that these were the sources of the misfortunes and calamities of this country.—He said that advantage would be taken of this bill, in order to do the very thing which ministers affected to prevent. The people would avail themselves of it, because they were provoked to it by the tyrannical and absurd restrictions imposed upon them by the present bill. He should state this more at large hereafter. Whether ministers would hereafter bring in another bill upon this subject, he knew not; but he was sure this was inadequate to the object for which it was professed to be brought forward.

DECEMBER 3.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

Mr. Mainwaring presented a petition from the churchwardens, minister, sidesman, overscers, commissioners of paving, guardians of the poor, &c. in Clerkenwell parish, whose names were all obtained, he said, in a few hours, in support of the bills.

Mr. SHERIDAN said that the churchwarden and sidesman who subscribed this petition, were in the singular number, for there was only one churchwar-

den out of four, one sidesman out of four, and two overseers out of six who espoused it. Nothing could be more fair and open than the petition which he had the honor to present the other day against the convention bills, from the inhabitants of Clerk-enwell parish; for a requisition was made by 24 housekeepers to call a public meeting; a hand-bill, of which 4,000 copies were distributed, was signed by 26 housekeepers; six respectable houses were open for the reception of signatures, and in 12 hours, 1,200 names were subscribed. Nothing could be more clandestine than the manner in which this petition was obtained, for it was privately prepared, and carried from door to door, where the poorer inhabitants were terrified into a subscription by the appearance of the collectors of rates and taxes, and the public-houses by the appearance of a magistrate, who, at the next quarter sessions, might otherwise refuse a license. In the mean time it was a notorious fact, said Mr. Sheridan, that a week had been employed on this occasion.

Lord W. Russell presented a petition from the noblemen, gentlemen, clergy, freeholders, and other undersigned inhabitants of the county of Surrey against the convention bills. The petition was subscribed by 6091 persons; regular notice had been given of the meeting, gentlemen of great ability on both sides of the question attended. There had been a minority at the meeting, which minority had entered into several resolutions, and had drawn up a petition which had been signed by about 2000 persons. Mr. T. Onslow conceived, that there were some floating particles in the atmosphere of the house, which, coming in contact with some gentlemen, produced in them, a disorder called the cacoethes loquendi. These particles, he was happy to say, had not come in contact with him, and, therefore, he could assure the house that he would not trouble them with a long speech upon the subject. The petition that had been presented, had been signed by above 6000 persons. The petition in favor of the bills by about 2000 persons. But he wished to know how many of those 6000 persons were freeholders of the county, and how much of the property of the county they represented.

Mr. Sheridan could not help being of opinion, that though Mr. Onslow had rebuked the practice of the *cacoethes loquendi*, he had not wholly refrained

from it. To the wit of the honorable gentleman he had nothing to object, except that it seemed not to be without preparation. The joke about the dismissal of Ministers the house had heard before. Though, therefore, the repetition of signatures to a petition might be a good thing, he never heard that the repetition deserved that praise. He was happy to hear it now avowed by the staunchest friends of the minister, that the surest way to procure the signatures and the suffrages of the people, was to represent, that they would tend in their consequences to removing him from his situation. This was a truth which the minister himself had for some time been in the habit of hearing, but hearing with affected incredulity, from the opposition side of the house. Now, however, he could not well resist the conviction that flashed upon him, from the testimony of those adherents who were most tender of his interests. Of petitions, the honorable gentleman seemed to think, that the sole excellence consisted in the weight of property which they represented. As to the system of measuring the value of a man's opinion by the size of the freehold he possessed, it seemed founded on the philosophy of Serjeant Kite, who held in contempt "the opinion of any man that was not six feet high"—a doctrine which he supposed that honorable gentleman would be unwilling to subscribe to. In regard to this petition, it was certainly three times higher in the strength of its opinion than the other, because it contained three times the number of signatures, having 6000 to 2000. An honorable gentleman opposite had wished for accurate descriptions; he supposed he had taken the hint from a foreigner, whose name he observed in the petition in favour of the bills, which he begged the clerk to read.

The clerk read, "Alexander Dupont, proprietaire et fidele sujet du Roi d'Angleterre."

This person, Mr. Sheridan remarked, could not be a very disinterested petitioner, as, if he had refused to sign, he might have been liable to have been that moment turned out of the kingdom.

Alderman Harley presented a petition from Aldersgate ward in favor of the bills.

Mr. Le Mesurier said, he was rather an old inhabitant of the ward, and from the contrariety of opinions in it there was fear of tumult. He urged that this petition was signed by the greatest number of persons of property, while many of the signatures to the other were subscribed by persons who had tasted the honorable Alderman's bounty during the hard frost.

Mr. Sheridan rose to allude to the speech of Alderman Le Mesurier. Many persons ought not, it had been said, to have signed that petition, because they had tasted the bounty of Mr. Anderson. Was this principle to be tolerated? Was this a condition to which the people of England ought to be reduced? Was humanity to be exerted for such purposes? Were the people, as soon as they tasted the bounties of the rich, to surrender from that moment all right of judgment and decision? There was, he hoped, but one man in the kingdom who would maintain such a doctrine.

Alderman Le Mesurier complained of misrepresentation; he had meant only that the persons who had partaken of Mr. Anderson's bounty ought not to have signed a petition against him. An Alderman, Mr. Le Mesurier lamented, could not open his mouth, but he must be cavilled at.

Mr. Sheridan could not conceive why Mr. Le Mesurier should suppose him to be so great an enemy to aldermen.

The order of the day for the third reading of the bill for more effectually preventing seditious assemblies was read. Mr. Harding spoke at considerable length in favor of the bill. Mr. M. Montagu followed.

Mr. Sheridan (who had risen at the same time with Mr. Montagu, but had given way.) "The honorable gentleman (Mr. Hardinge) made so many direct allusions to me, that it could not appear sur-

prising, that immediately on his sitting down, I should have risen to present myself to your notice. I am not sorry, however, that I was interrupted, as the last honorable speaker has pursued nearly the same line of argument, and by replying to both, I shall be able to save the time and trouble of the house. The honorable gentleman having insinuated a good deal of blame to the opposition against the bill, has, by way of preserving the appearance of candour, thought proper to admit, that ministers have not been sufficiently alert in checking the progress of the evil which it has now become necessary to oppose; and that the magistrates have not been altogether free from blame, in not properly enforcing the authority attached to their functions. If this statement be just, if the evil does proceed from the inactivity and negligence of magistrates, what remedy does this bill afford for checking the proceedings of seditious meetings, or the circulation of dangerous libels? Instead of any thing in the bill which is calculated to call forth their energy, and aid their exertions, it destroys the reverence of their authority, and opposes an obstacle to the discharge of their functions, by placing them in a situation of odium and suspicion with respect to the people, the effect of which, I venture to affirm, will be such, that when once the nature of this bill is properly explained, there is not one magistrate of respectability in this country who will chuse to retain the office. It has been stated, that in a former debate, I took occasion to throw reflections on the characters of magistrates. On the contrary, there are many who fill the situation, whom I regard with the highest respect; but my objection to the magistrates of Westminster, to whom at that time I referred, was, that they were paid by ministers, and removeable at pleasure. I have to return my thanks to the learned gentleman for many things which he addressed to me in the way of personal civility, and which, coming from him, I confess have great weight. I have

secondly to thank him for taking up the question exactly in the point of view in which I wish to consider it—whether the necessity of the case is such as to call for the measure now proposed to be adopted? The learned gentleman took an opportunity to pay some compliments to the speech of another learned friend (Mr. Grant) on a preceding debate. That speech, in point of subtlety of discussion, lucid order, and neatness of language, I never heard surpassed within the walls of this house. But when I have paid to it this tribute, I must remark, that in this speech the two main points were omitted, and that amidst the abundance of other matter which the learned gentleman had introduced, he carefully avoided to touch either on the existence of the evil, or the fitness of the remedy. The honorable gentleman (Mr. Hardinge) said, that I thought I had done much to drive ministers from the grounds upon which they supported their present measure, when I called upon them to prove it. This appeal to proof he seems to consider as not at all entitled to have any weight as an argument. How the honorable gentleman, who, from his professional habits, is accustomed to receive nothing as fact which is not substantiated by evidence, should treat so lightly an appeal to proof, in the present instance, is to me rather surprising. But the honorable gentleman thought proper to suppose himself in an extraordinary situation—that of arguing against himself, and in favour of those who espoused the opposite side of the question. For my part, I regarded this as not in any manner extraordinary, since such I conceived to be the tenor of the honorable gentleman's arguments throughout the whole of his speech, and that, however they might be directed against us, they were in reality calculated to favour the side of the question which we espoused. I must remark, however, that when the honorable gentleman, in opposition to his own views, took up the defence of the societies, no doubt from the habit

which professional men have of alternately supporting the two sides of a question, he pleaded their cause in such a manner, that, with all due respect to his talents, he should be the last man to whom I would recommend them to apply as clients. The honorable gentleman objects to my short call upon Ministers—"Prove it;" but has himself, from the particular emphasis which he attaches to brief expressions, laid great stress on the phrase "revolutionary principle." He contends, that this revolutionary principle has made greater progress in the country, since the repeal of the suspension of the Habeas Corpus; and when we deny the fact, and call upon ministers to prove it, he says that it is not to be established by juridical proof. This is a sort of proof which we never required, nor expected in the present instance. I have only to refer him to what took place on the suspension of the Habeas Corpus; no juridical proof was then proposed; but ministers, by going into a secret committee, by bringing forward a mass of papers, and drawing up a report, attempted to establish that sort of prudential proof, which might serve as a ground for the measure which they then called on the house to adopt. It is not without good reason I call for proof. In the instance to which I now allude, and on other occasions, ministers have deceived me and the country, by reporting plots, which were afterwards proved to have no existence, and circulating alarms, which the event shewed to be wholly unfounded. First, a rumour was spread over the country of an attempt to seize upon the Tower, &c. which those who were the most active in its circulation must have known to be untrue. Secondly, the existence of the plots, after the fullest legal investigation at the Old Bailey, was negatived by the verdicts of repeated juries. But, lastly, ministers had recourse to the miserable trumped-up plot to assassinate the King, by means of a poisoned arrow, which, though they must have been conscious had not the smallest foundation, they

yet suffered to go abroad, in order to produce an impression on the country, and aid the purpose of alarm. I have been three times deceived, and they now call upon me to trust them without any shew of proof whatever.

When the honorable gentleman asserts, that the danger arising from the propagation of certain principles has increased, I must remark, that he contradicts the express declaration of His Majesty's ministers at the commencement of the session. At that time, either ministers must have known that the danger had increased, or they must have since derived some new light on the subject. What fresh information, I will ask, have they since acquired? In what manner do they get over the difficulty of having made His Majesty avow a sentiment, which they now come forward to contradict by a legislative proceeding? If we are to appeal merely to the grounds of general notoriety and observation, I will affirm, that, so far from increasing the danger has diminished. But I call upon a learned gentleman, high in the profession of the law. He stated, upon a former occasion, that his table was covered with libels, and that he knew not which he was to select for prosecution. Will he now state that he has any such occupation? Citizen Lee, indeed, and one or two other miserable publishers, have the other day been taken up. But does there, in the present moment, exist any serious alarm, from the extensive circulation or dangerous tendency of the libellous publications of those societies, who were formerly so much reproached with their mischievous activity? But there is another thing to which we ought to attend—the professions of the persons who form those societies. If formerly they preached up, that the house of commons ought not to be looked to in any representative capacity—if they disavowed the constitution—if they even menaced the throne, it was evident that they now held very different doctrines. They now came forward to petition the house of

commons, to acknowledge the constitution, and to approach the throne with respect. If even in these professions they were not sincere—if they assumed them only as a hypocritical mask to cover their real views, still it proved, that they were now so far curbed and suppressed, that even if they had circulated their doctrines in the country, in order to make converts, such was their experience of the character of the country, and such their sense of the reprobation which had every where attended their efforts, that they had now been compelled to abandon their object. The honorable gentleman accuses us with a degree of Jesuitical conduct, in avoiding to state the dangers to be apprehended from those societies; and calls upon us to point out a remedy adequate to the evil. I have no hesitation to state to him what are my views upon that subject. That there are among some of the members of those societies; dispositions hostile to the established constitution, I will not deny; a few desperate and abandoned individuals will always exist under every community. That there have likewise been some who have shewn their attachment to French principles, or rather, have gratified their own absurd vanity, by an adoption of French phrases, I am equally prepared to admit. They might conceive that such phrases would, in all probability, become the fashion; and tend to give currency to their principles. But what has been the consequence? That these infatuated men have shewn themselves as ignorant of the genius of the English character, and of their rooted attachment to the constitution, as ministers themselves, when they apprehended any danger from those proceedings. A violent alarm was now affected with respect to opinions which did not exactly tally with the particular forms under which the constitution was now carried on. Such has not always been the case. I beg leave to remind the right honorable gentleman, that he once entertained an opinion, that if a reform in parliament was not

adopted, though the form of the constitution might remain, its virtue and its energy would be lost. A noble duke carried the same sentiment farther, and contended, that universal suffrage, and annual parliaments, could alone restore the constitution to its pristine vigor and excellence. The noble duke, I understand, has since, at a public meeting, retracted that opinion; he candidly avowed, that such at one time were his sentiments; but that mature reflection on the state of the country, and attention to the events which had passed in a neighbouring kingdom, had induced him to form a different view of the subject. Such an avowal on the part of the noble duke was fair and manly. But were His Majesty's ministers alone to monopolize the right to a change of sentiment? Would they not allow others, who might have found their projects to be wild and chimerical, to be equally sincere in their professions of conversion? It has been said, that these societies were influenced by the example of France. May it not be presumed, that they will be reformed by its misfortunes? It is not reasonable to suppose, that after the experience they have had of the calamities which certain principles have produced in France;—after the reprobation which they have found to attend any attempt to introduce them here, and the impossibility of bringing them into practice under any shape, these societies may, for the present, have given up their views? I am now convinced that the danger is much less than was to be apprehended at any former period; and that nothing but the danger which may arise from the prosecution of despotic measures, such as the bill now submitted to your consideration, can tend to revive such principles in this country. The honorable gentleman admits the value of what is taken away, but argues the necessity of giving up some part, in order to preserve the remainder. Upon the face of the business, I contend, that there is no proof of any danger having

existed. And I insist upon this the more strenuously, because no proof has been attempted to be brought forward. Formerly, when the right hon. gentleman thought that he was in possession of proof of which he could avail himself, he moved for a secret committee; had he been in possession of the same materials, he would no doubt have had recourse to the same measure. The right honorable gentleman asks in what situation societies will be, when this bill has passed? It will only be necessary that the meetings should be publicly advertised. The right honorable gentleman says, that the evil of these meetings was, that they were secret and clandestine. How far is this consistent with the charge brought against them, that their mischievous tendency chiefly resulted from the impression which their proceedings made upon the public mind, and the multitude whom they brought together? So little regard had they to concealment, that all the papers which formed the materials of the report of the secret committee, had been repeatedly advertised in every public journal. Mr. Sheridan here entered into a particular examination of the clauses of the bill. The first enacted, that no meeting of exceeding fifty persons should be held, excepting notice was given by seven householders, of the intention to summon such meeting. Thus all journeymen, and others, who were not householders, were debarred from the privilege of holding a meeting, and of complaining of any grievance which might particularly attach to their situation, from the oppression of masters, or the high price of rent. At a time when it was reckoned equally a question of humanity and expediency, not to mark too strongly the distinctions between the different classes of the community, was it either humane or advisable, to deprive so large a body of men of the right of petitioning—to exclude them from the privilege of discussing their complaints, and the

means of demanding redress? After this bill had passed, they would no longer have an opportunity of meeting to discuss their particular grievances, or be able to exercise their right of petition.

He next adverted to the mode in which notice was required to be given of the meeting, which was so clogged with embatarrassments, that no editor of a newspaper would chuse to take upon himself the responsibility of publishing the advertisement. As to the notice to be given to the clerk of the peace, it depended upon so many circumstances, that it was doubtful whether in any instance it could take effect. The clerk of the peace might be absent: he was required to communicate the notice to three justices, who might not be in the way to receive it within due time. It was a mockery to pretend to give people the privilege of holding a meeting, and to affix to that privilege such conditions as did, not at all depend on their own will and choice. Why had not the old modes of giving notice been adopted by means of the common cryer, or by an intimation at the church door? Newspapers in comparison, were but modern vehicles of such notices. This remark became more important, from the consideration of what was the present state of the press. Most of the country papers were either under the influence of the Administration, or at least strongly infected with party prejudices. Some of those who conducted them, held situations under government; and could it be expected, that under these circumstances, sheltered too by the pretence of a responsibility, which they might not chuse to incur, that they would publish the notice of a meeting for any purpose, which they had reason to suppose would be disagreeable to those who were in power? He contended, that all those restrictions amounted, in fact, to a total prohibition; and that it would have been more manly to have put an end to all public meetings at once. But allowing the meeting to be held, it depends on the discretion of a justice to dissolve

it immediately, if he thinks the matter which is proposed, improper to be discussed. It may be said, that he is not left to an arbitrary discretion, but that he is bound by precise and fixed rules. But how does this reasoning apply? If the question for the consideration of the meeting should be the dismissal of ministers, the restoration of peace, a reform in parliament, or the regulation of the public expenditure, may he not contend that these are topics very unfit to be argued under the circumstances of the times, and which might tend to excite hatred or contempt against the established government? But it was said, the justice was responsible for the exercise of his authority. Might he not be of the same opinion as the right honorable gentleman, that the discussion of certain topics, at a particular time, was unwise and unseasonable? For instance, if the matter propounded was, what had been stated in petitions recorded on the journals of the house, that we are not the representatives of the people; that a great number are sent to this house by peers, and that seats are openly bought like stalls for cattle at a fair; might not the justice conscientiously consider this representation as calculated to excite hatred or contempt against the established constitution? But the honorable gentleman stated, that the justice came to the meeting merely to watch the proceedings; that he was to wait till he heard the name of the person who had expressed himself seditiously; and then what harm was there if he should arrest the person? Gentlemen seemed to think that they had gained a great point, by having inserted in the bill the words, wilfully and advisedly. They did not recollect that this might afterwards be a fit question for the consideration of a jury; it was precisely the circumstance of which the magistrate could not judge on the spur of the moment. Was it nothing new that every debate of Englishmen should be watched and controlled by a magistrate! In the Riot Act, the

expressions which gave to the magistrate his authority were "authorised, empowered and required." In the present bill ministers dared not insert the word required. They were well aware that no person of independent character, or proper feelings, would choose to put himself in the situation of relating the proceeding of a public meeting; and in what a situation must the person be who is obliged, in the course of speaking, to examine the countenance of a magistrate, to observe his nods and looks, in order to discover to what a degree he meets his approbation, or how far he may proceed with safety to himself! Another question was, what was to be done with the man after he was seized? Mr. Sheridan referred to the Riot Act, the principles of which had, in his opinion, been mistaken when it was adverted to, or quoted as applicable to the present case. According to the Riot Act, the person who was guilty of a treasonable tumult was found not only in the meditation, but in the very commission of the criminal act. It was necessary to arrest his hands, and to prevent him from the power of doing farther mischief. But was there that exigency, that pressure in the present case, which required a similar principle to be adopted? By this bill the magistrates were empowered to seize men whose sentiments they should disapprove; and if they resisted, to command that they should separate, under the penalty of military execution. But Mr. Sheridan put the case, that they might refuse to separate, not tumultuously and riotously, but quietly and peaceably. On what pretext would the magistrate then be able to enforce the law? He need not observe, that the Riot Act was brought in during the time of a rebellion, when danger was apprehended, not from loose societies, but from a considerable body of gentlemen, whose numbers were supposed to amount to one-third, if not a larger proportion of the country, disaffected to the existing government, and disposed to bring in a

family, whose existence on the throne had been found to be incompatible with the rights and liberties of Englishmen. Under these circumstances, it was impossible to view the provisions of the riot act, and not to admire the merciful temper which then prevailed, in comparison with the bloody spirit which had dictated the clauses of the present bill.

Mr. Sheridan remarked, that much had been said about resistance. He was obliged to gentlemen for giving him an opportunity of offering his opinion on that subject. If the bill should pass into a law, and there should be a body ready to resist, in what mode would he recommend to them to oppose that resistance? He would recommend it to them to oppose in the way not of an active, but a passive resistance. To meet above the number of fifty, to send for a magistrate, and if they were ordered to disperse, to say not a word, but to remain together above an hour. If men had no lawful means of meeting: if they resorted to this mode of asserting their right; if they kept their seats, would you say, that magistrates were entitled to enforce military execution, in order to disperse them, or send them to prison? If they said, we are slaves, we will submit to any fate rather than remain in this abject state of subjection; he put it to the hearts and consciences of the house, whether a jury would be able to find such men guilty? To have recourse to such laws was the characteristic of a feeble and cruel policy, equally impotent as detestable. It is thus, said Mr. Sheridan, that you blaspheme and violate your statute books with oppressive and sanguinary laws, which afterwards you dare not execute. If this bill passes into a law, gentlemen will be very slow of taking upon them the office of magistrate. I objected to the magistrates of Westminster, as the hired and temporary agents of ministers.—You will then find none but such to perform the functions of the magistracy. None but those who are disposed to rank as the mere servants of the crown, and who

think that the people have no rights, excepting what they derive from the throne, who are entirely prepared to become the dependants of ministers, and to act as the tools and agents of their policy. Now for the alternative ; supposing that this bill does not pass into a law.—It is then stated that all these societies will go on to imitate the example of France, and to introduce a similar order of things into this country. The honorable gentleman however, admits, that there is some difference of character between the inhabitants of the two countries ; and what do gentlemen suppose to constitute the distinguishing excellence of a government ? Not any advantage resulting from theory ; not any particular form of administration ; but its tendency to produce souls and hearts of a more noble, generous, and benevolent texture, than those which are called forth under the influence of a different government. Gentlemen seemed to be afraid that we should undertake the task of vindicating the French revolution. Do they not recollect that in its outset it was distinguished by sentiments of the most refined philanthropy, and the most exalted benevolence ; that declarations of universal fraternity, and wishes for eternal union, were so often repeated, as to approach to a species of cant ? But it is said, that all the subsequent horrors and bloodshed proceeded from the influence of a club. Yes, said Mr. Sheridan, they proceeded from the influence of a club, but it was the club of Pilnitz. That associated combination of despots were the first promoters of all those dreadful scenes which have since been acted on the stage of France. There is nothing so cowardly or so cruel as panic. When the French found that powerful combination formed to crush their rising revolution, panic and terror took the place of reason and moderation. To the mild maxims and equitable principles of the early supporters of the revolution, succeeded a system of tyranny and oppression. Nothing is so mild and gentle as

courage. On the contrary, panic rules by panic; terror governs by terror; hence we may account for the atrocities of the successive tyrants of France, who knowing that their throne was founded in fear, were sensible that it could only be cemented by blood. Mr. Sheridan said, that from this example he gathered two lessons: First, that the miseries and the sufferings of France had not proceeded from any circulation of opinions, but from the influence of a system of terror: Secondly, that we ought not from observation of the conduct of Frenchmen, to judge of the English mind, and the English character. As to what our situation would be when the bill was passed, it would be a state of the most abject slavery. My right honorable friend (Mr. Fox) truly and eloquently stated, that the prosperity of the country depended on the energy and freedom of the people; as our constitution is supposed not to be supported by numbers, but by all. Every exertion of extensive private benevolence, of great public utility, has been effected not by solitary efforts, but by great meetings.—Those great meetings were a source of the virtues of the people, and a security for the preservation of the national character, and it was essential that they should be maintained in their freedom and purity. An idea had been attempted to be inculcated, that the bill had come out of the committee materially amended.—No such thing was the case. A few trifling alterations only had taken place. Mr. Sheridan said, that he considered himself justified in abstaining from all interference with the bill, and proposing no alterations, because he considered the whole as a tissue of absurdity and folly, of cruelty and blood; it was all deformity to the eye, and corruption to the touch. With respect to the connection between the outrage upon His Majesty and the king-killing pamphlet, he did not deny that such a connection existed, but he affirmed that had not been made out by any sort of proof. He felt himself called upon

to be particularly cautious, when he recollected that the spies of ministers had been the authors, instigators, publishers, and circulators, of the most gross and inflammatory compositions, in order to fix the imputation of guilt upon others. Mr. Sheridan said, that he thought, in the whole conduct of ministers, he perceived a design to represent the feelings of irritation and indignation in the public mind, as not resulting from their own pernicious measures, or the misfortunes in which they had plunged the country, but as directed against a person, who by the principles of the constitution cannot err. They wished to point at that quarter, in order to screen themselves from those feelings of indignation, which they were sensible they had so justly merited. In this design they were favored in the nature of the war in which we were engaged. Other wars had been undertaken for objects connected more with the character, the commerce, and territory of the country: this was strictly a war of kings; and under this idea, the minds of rash and ignorant men, smarting under their sufferings, might be led to mistake the proper objects of their resentment, and to indulge a momentary irritation against the sovereign. This mistake might the more readily be cherished, as the only pretence for which the war had been so long carried on, was from an opinion that seemed to prevail in the cabinet, that a great nation could not have a trust-worthy government, under which it could enjoy prosperity, or maintain connections with other powers, unless it had a monarch at its head. Ministers might congratulate themselves upon the successes of their artifices; the outrage upon the sovereign, if it was not merely accidental, was to them a pledge of their security. They had interposed the throne as a shield between themselves and the effect of popular fury; they employed the sceptre as a conductor, in order to draw off from their own heads the lightning of the resentment of an injured nation. Mr. She-

ridan then adverted to what Mr. Hardinge had stated respecting the license of the theatres, the history of which he explained. He complimented Lord Chesterfield's speech against the bill for licensing the stage, which he thought by far the best production his lordship ever wrote or delivered. He should not, however, have noticed this trivial incident in Mr. Hardinge's argument, had it not been for the personal application it had to him. The principle of that regulation was moral and not political; in the latter view he could not conceive who was to be answerable, the author, actor, or manager. Was Mr. Bensley to be accountable for the sentiments put into the mouth of Pierre, in *Venice Preserved*? No man indeed could say, that he did not speak them deliberately. The origin of the restriction was in order to repress indecencies and abuses—such as a man must want common decorum to introduce. As a proof that the power of the licencer was sometimes abused, Mr. Sheridan alluded to an anecdote respecting himself: on the night before the first appearance of the *School for Scandal*, he was informed that it could not be performed, as a licence was refused. It happened at this time there was the famous city contest for the office of chamberlain, between Wilkes and Hopkins. The latter had been charged with some practices similar to those of Moses the Jew, in lending money to young men under age; and it was supposed that the character of the play was levelled at him, in order to injure him in his contest, in which he was supported by the ministerial interest. In the warmth of a contested election, the piece was represented as a factious and seditious opposition to a court candidate. He, however, went to Lord Hertford, then Lord Chamberlain, who laughed at the affair, and gave the license. For his own part, he deemed a theatre no fit place for politics, nor would he think much of the principles or taste of the man who should wish to introduce them into stage represen-

tation. With respect to the London stage, the fact however was, that the players were considered as the king's servants, and the theatre the king's theatre; and there was nothing so natural as that no pieces should be permitted that were not agreeable to His Majesty. And Covent Garden and Drury Lane were the only licensed theatres in the kingdom; none others were subject to license at all; so that point of the honorable gentleman's argument fell to the ground. Mr. Sheridan concluded with solemnly and seriously declaring, that if the bill passed into a law, he believed, that it would either be the final doom of liberty in this country, or that it must lead to those dreadful scenes of distraction and commotion, which every man must deprecate, and which he would almost rather die than be compelled to witness.

A division took place upon the question for the third reading of the bill. Ayes 266; noes 51.

DECEMBER 4.

ARMY EXTRAORDINARIES.

The report of the resolutions of the committee of supply on the extraordinaries of the army was brought up, and read a first time, and on the second reading, Mr. Whitbread moved an amendment, "That the sum charged for building of barracks should be left out of the resolution."

Mr. SHERIDAN rose to second the amendment of his honorable friend. He considered it as a part of the system of ministers, to erect military fortresses all over the kingdom, in order to establish a military government; and therefore this article, of all others, had no pretence to a place among the extraordinaries of the army. The extraordinaries of the army were supposed to consist of nothing but such expenses as could not be foreseen. The erection of barracks did not come under that description, and was an expense which must have been foreseen.

He was convinced, that if their plan had been stated at the beginning, to its utmost extent, it would have found but a feeble support in the house; and therefore he was desirous, that even now it should be developed, and submitted to them as a subject of open and separate discussion. Besides being unconstitutional in its object, it was become a mere government job; for he had heard of barrack-masters being appointed, with large salaries, where there were no barracks, and no intention of erecting them. With respect to the West-India expedition, he wished for nothing so much as a fair inquiry into the subject. He hoped that it was the intention of administration to institute an inquiry into the whole conduct of the war, and then he would have an opportunity of shewing the inhuman neglect of this expedition, in which there was not only an extravagant waste of treasure and national honor, but also of the lives of their countrymen.

The house divided. For the amendment, 28; against it 74.

Mr. Sheridan asked whether the sum which they were now called upon to vote, would cover the whole expense of the barracks. From his own observation, and from the report of others, he understood that a great part of the barracks were by no means completed; they were at present in a state of preparation, and it might cost the country as much more before they were finished. Now he wished to put to the house, suppose that the sum total of these barracks should amount to two millions, (and it was not probable that it would fall short of one million,) if the estimate had in the first instance been laid before the house, would they have consented to incur so enormous an expense for such an object? Now, however, they were called upon to vote it away in scraps and parcels, without any account being given of the application, or having any means to judge how far they were applying the money of their constituents for a proper purpose.

DECEMBER 7.

LOAN.

The loan was raised for 1796 without the usual mode of competition. Mr. Pitt assigned as a reason for this conduct, that the persons concerned in procuring the last loan, had not yet received the latter instalments due to them upon it. He had, however, so far consulted the good of the public, that the interest to them would not prove more than four pounds four shillings and threepence in the hundred. This assertion gave birth to a long and tedious discussion.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he rose to make one observation; the right honorable gentleman had admitted that he had been in an error with respect to what passed with Mr. Boyd; that when he came to carry his project of competition into execution, he had, for the first time, discovered that he was entangled in an engagement, of which he was not before aware; and that had it not been for this, he would have proceeded to a loan by competition. He thought it extraordinary, that in transacting this loan, he should have forgotten the circumstances that passed in conversation with Mr. Boyd. He said, that in a former conversation with Mr. Morgan, the right honorable gentleman was chargeable with the same forgetfulness as to the circumstances of the Austrian loan; that Mr. Morgan and his friends had taken fire at this, and had posted up a paper in the Stock Exchange. He thought it somewhat extraordinary, that after this rebuke which the right honorable gentleman had received, he should omit being explicit, whether or not there was to be another Austrian loan? He asserted, that the effect of this negligence would be a total loss of character, as to punctuality of business, a great pecuniary loss to Mr. Morgan and his friends, and a loss to the public of nearly 400,000*l.* sterling. How far such a loss was criminal, he should leave to the committee. The question he wished to ask was, whether the right honorable gentleman consi-

dered himself bound to contract no new loan till the last payment on the former one was made good ?

DECEMBER 8.

WAYS AND MEANS.

Mr SHERIDAN said, that though it would be more proper to come in detail to the taxes, he wished merely to observe at large on one or two points. When the bills should be brought in on the several taxes, there would be ample scope for particular observation and discussion. With regard to the tax on horses, he thought it should not extend to the agricultural part of the country. When before a tax was laid on the carts, to which his honorable friend (Mr. Curwen) alluded, the law was repealed because the house thought that part of the community ought to be held sacred. Besides, the tax on husbandry then was not so heavy as now ; and the farmer was then more able to bear taxation. He thought the right honorable gentleman also wrong in his calculation of this tax ; he doubted the amount produced by the tax on horses of pleasure, without allowing any diminution in consequence of the duty ; for certainly gentlemen would be induced to keep fewer horses on account of the tax. The plea of laying a duty on the farmer's horses, namely, the dearness of provisions, was a bad one ; for if the farmer, already from a principle of rapacity, stood out for an extravagant price for his provisions, would the house, he asked, increase that rapacity ? Would they furnish him an excuse for asking more ? Again, the horse-dealer was thrown into a disagreeable predicament by doubling his license. The imposing a duty of 20*l.* on him, injured him in the exercise of his business. Again, how would the tax be extended to all horses ? Did the right honorable gentleman mean to employ officers to ascertain the number of horses—the age when the duty was to

attach? How could he ascertain all the horses in New Forest and elsewhere? In fact, if the right honorable gentleman followed up his own principle, he would find that the operation of the tax would defeat its own purpose; for in New Forest, and such places, there were horses that were not employed for any service. On the other hand, if he confined the tax to horses of pleasure, he would find that it would be unproductive. Upon the whole, then, he wished him to reconsider it, and substitute some more equitable and productive tax. The next thing to which he wished to call the attention of the house, was the tax on collateral successions. He was free to say, that this had so many difficulties as to render it, to all intents and purposes, impracticable. There would appear so many difficulties in preparing the provisions, and enforcing the regulations of the bills on this head, that, on the first blush of it, he thought it ought to be abandoned. With regard to personal property, did the right honorable gentleman mean to ascertain the real value of estates, to find the amount of debts? Could an officer be able to ascertain all this, and afterwards, on a division, strike a balance? He would put a case: How could the commercial stock in trade of a merchant be ascertained, and his debts, with a thousand other complicated circumstances, be regulated? With regard to real property, how could it be made attach to life estate? In the cases of mortgage, it would be difficult to ascertain the real value above incumbrance. He thought Mr. Pitt was beyond the mark, in stating the property of the nation in this way at twenty-eight years purchase. In this estimate the right honorable gentleman could not be regular. Was he to institute assessors to ascertain the amount of personal property? and, on the whole, would he constitute an inquisitorial power? He said thus much, merely to induce the right honorable gentleman to consider the business maturely;

man said, that he would trouble the house only with a few words, because that order of things which had been intimated in the speech of His Majesty, affording a reasonable expectation of security and permanence in any treaty which might be formed, had arrived. Undoubtedly we were told in His Majesty's speech, that such an order of things was expected. I should have hoped that the right honorable gentleman would not have come forward to say that peace was at all nearer, but only that the obstacle arising from the nature of the government in France was removed. But I ask why the right honorable gentleman comes now to tell us, for the first time, that the government of France is of a description with which we may safely negotiate, and is capable of maintaining the relations of peace and amity? Time and experience have no doubt enabled him to alter his former opinions on that subject. All the advantages which he can have derived from time and experience, have occurred within the last five weeks. This is the utmost space which he can possibly assign for the acquirement of those new means of information, which have produced so material an alteration in his sentiments. But in fact, I contend, that he has had only one week, and that upon the experience of that single week, he now comes forward, not to propose a jealous peace, an armed truce, but a peace affording a reasonable prospect of security and permanence. If he contends that he had more time to make up his mind on the subject, I ask him, why he did not bring forward the result of his deliberation before he settled the terms of the loan? This one week's experience of the right honorable gentleman has cost the country two millions of money! What excuse, what apology can he possibly alledge to the nation in justification of his conduct? Will he say that on Wednesday last, when he arranged the terms of the loan, he had not taken such a view of the subject—he did not possess such means of information—he

had not such grounds of decision as he has since acquired? The effect of the message last night has been, that the loan is this day at a premium of two per cent. and a sum of twenty-two hundred thousand pounds is lost to this country: but I must confess, when I see the right honorable gentleman turning so short—when I see him altering his opinions and reversing his former declarations, I think that he is not sincere in the object which he avows. If I conceived him sincere, so desirable is the conclusion of a peace to every friend of his country, however much I might think his policy deserving of censure, I should avoid every species of reproach on the present occasion; but when I see the right honorable gentleman bringing forward such a declaration, at the present moment, in order to defeat the proposition (Mr. Grey's motion for peace) of my honorable friend, I cannot help adverting to the grounds on which he may be supposed to have changed his opinion—I must look how that government is composed which he now states to be capable of negotiation. I have only to refer to his own statement on a recent occasion (the opening of the budget.) This very government he then stated to be not only on the verge, but in the very gulph of bankruptcy. And having stated that it was on the verge of what must inevitably throw it down and bring it to destruction, he now submits a proposition to the house, that it is not only a form of government with which we may safely negotiate, but capable of maintaining peace on a footing of permanence and security! But will he say, that he is more reconciled to the men who exercise the functions of that government? Some time since it was said, that men of milder character had obtained the administration, and that a more moderate system of policy would be adopted. Of the five who compose the executive directory, four voted for the death of the King, the fifth happened to be absent at that period. These were the very men whose pernicious

councils were said to have brought on the war with this country, and with respect to whom it had been affirmed, that no settled order of things could take place in France till they had fallen under the sword of justice. Had the right honorable gentleman then, changed his opinion, merely because the forms of the government were altered, because the old men met in one place, and the younger in another? Was it on the ground of such trifling distinctions he now came forward to contradict every opinion, to retract every profession which he had formerly uttered, and to pledge himself to a new declaration of sentiment, without any facts, or appearance of facts, by which it was supported? There is something so contradictory in all this, that I think it impossible the right honorable gentleman can be sincere.— When I find him one day saying, that the French government is in the gulph of bankruptcy, and on another, that it is capable of maintaining a permanent peace, I cannot help thinking that he has still some subterfuge in store, and that he yet hopes to find a pretext to justify him in continuing the contest, for the purpose of restoring the old despotism of France. If we were not to look to the subject seriously, we might perhaps find some other reason for this change of sentiment, on the part of the right honorable gentleman. If it be said that the French government has now revoked its declaration of interfering with the governments of other countries, and on that account is better qualified for negotiation, that declaration, I must remark, has long been revoked. The charge of a wanton interference with other governments, applied to the French, I contend, never to have been just. The declaration which they made on that subject, was in consequence of the coalition of Kings. When the confederated princes expressed their determination not to permit them to effect their revolution, and establish a government for themselves, they thought themselves justified in retaliating, by declaring their

enmity to all kingly governments, and their readiness to assist in their destruction. But in whatever light this declaration be considered, whether as a retort or retaliation, in no point of view am I prepared to justify it—it has long since been disclaimed. What then is the period at which the right honorable gentleman thinks proper to declare that the French government is capable of maintaining the accustomed relations of peace and amity? At the moment then, when members seek to establish their power by the system of forced elections, when they avow the principle of not being responsible to their constituents, when they seek to establish their authority in the capital by force of arms, and have the place of their deliberations surrounded by large bodies of the military, in order to overawe the people: at such a moment, when the members of the French government adopt the system of self-election, of taking all power into their own hands, and of treating with contempt the rights, the opinions, and the interests of the people, the gentlemen on the other side exclaim:—"This is something like a regular government! This is a form of administration with which we may treat with safety; we have now got something resembling the worst parts of the British constitution;" and it is to be remarked, that the way in which those gentlemen choose to express their attachment to the constitution, is by the eagerness which they shew to retain its abuses. There is one word in the address which must have prevented it from obtaining an unanimous occurrence—the expression which relates to the justice of the war. We never can subscribe to the justice of the principle upon which the war was commenced. But this is not the only objection to the address in its present form; it expresses a principle which must ever remove to a distance any hope of secure and permanent peace, till the whole country shall join to disclaim and reprobate the system derived from such a source. It seems that the present state of things in

France, is such, as ministers think may safely admit of negociation. This principle has often been before intimated, but has never been before so openly avowed. It now seems that we must carry on a war till a form of government takes place agreeable to the fancy and caprice of His Majesty's ministers. If it should happen that the government is not so shaped and framed, as exactly to coincide with their ideas, we must be immediately plunged into all the horrors of war. If the present form of government, which happens to tally with the notions of ministers, should be changed during the progress of negociation—if this government, of which they have had only the experience of five weeks, should be thought to require some alteration, after peace is concluded, and the house sanctions the principle which is now avowed, ministers may think themselves justified in entering into new hostilities, and involving the country in a new war. As long as that principle continues to be avowed, and to be acted upon, we may have a hollow and an armed truce, but we never can have any thing like a secure and permanent peace. The honorable gentleman has been so very concise as not to afford me an opportunity of saying so much as I might otherwise have been called upon to bring forward. I must conclude with most decidedly reprobating the principle, that any objections on the part of ministers to a particular form of government, shall be, in any instance, deemed a just cause for commencing and continuing hostilities. On that ground I take the liberty of suggesting the following amendment:—

“Your Majesty's faithful commons, having thus manifested their determination to give Your Majesty the most vigorous support in the further prosecution of the war, in case just and reasonable terms of peace should be refused on the part of the enemy; and having declared the cordial satisfaction they feel at Your Majesty's gracious intention to meet any disposition to negociation on the part of

the enemy, with an earnest desire to give it the fullest and speediest effect, cannot at the same time avoid expressing the deep regret they feel, that Your Majesty should ever have been advised to consider the internal order of things in France to have been such, as should not have induced Your Majesty at any time to meet a disposition to negociation on the part of the enemy.

“And your faithful commons feel themselves at this conjuncture the more forcibly called on to declare this opinion, because if the present existing order of things in France be admitted as the motive and inducement to negociation, a change in that order of things, may be considered as a ground for discontinuing negociation begun, or even for abandoning a treaty concluded.

“Wherefore, Your Majesty’s faithful commons, duly reflecting on the calamitous waste of treasure and of blood, to which it is now manifest the acting on this principle has so unfortunately and so largely contributed; and greatly apprehensive of the grievous and ruinous consequences to which the persevering to act on such a principle must inevitably tend, do humbly and earnestly implore Your Majesty, that it may be altogether abandoned and disclaimed, and that the form of government, or internal order of things in France, whatever they may be, or shall become, may be no bar to a negociation for restoring to Your Majesty’s subjects the blessings of peace, whenever it can be effected on just and suitable terms for Your Majesty, and your allies.

“And as the principal bar to a negociation for peace appears to have been Your Majesty’s having been hitherto advised to consider the order of things in France, as precluding Your Majesty from meeting a disposition to negociation on the part of the enemy; Your faithful commons now humbly beseech Your Majesty to give distinct directions, that an immediate negociation may be entered on for the above salutary object.’

At the close of the debate—

Mr. Sheridan explained part of his speech which had been misrepresented by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.—The object of his amendment was, to prevent ministers, of whose sincerity he had many doubts, from making any possible change in the internal situation of France an excuse for breaking off a negociation. In answer to the invidious reflection of Mr. Pitt, addressed to his honorable friend (Mr. Grey,) “That the son had appeared to forget the services of his father (Sir C. Grey,)” he remarked that ministers had completely forgotten them, as that meritorious officer was literally the only one entrusted with an important command, who had received no mark of favor from His Majesty’s government.

Mr. Sheridan’s amendment was negatived without a division. The original address was then carried.

DECEMBER 10.

TREASON AND SEDITION BILLS.

The order of the day for the third reading was read. Mr. Western said the bill would deprive the people of mutual confidence and general freedom, whilst it would render the crime of high treason vague and indefinite, and the person of His Majesty unsafe. He would use a stronger argument in support of this observation than any of his own, by reading an extract from an author of great weight, which as forcibly applied to the present time as if it had been written for it. The extract was from Swift’s “Political Creed.”

Mr. J. H. Browne thought the authority of Swift in politics, was one that the house would not be inclined to allow, as that author was distinguished as a factious and illiberal writer on politics.

Mr. SHERIDAN rose and animadverted very warmly on the reflections thrown out by an honorable gentleman (Mr. J. H. Browne) on Dean Swift; and said, that gentleman had confined his whole argument to reviling the character and memory of

that great man. The house, he was sure, would feel an hereditary respect for that illustrious divine, and philosopher. But it was not merely from that motive, but from respect to truth, he now took up the point; for surely, every one would agree with him, that there never was a man, who with a more firm and manly spirit of attachment to the rights of mankind, maintained the cause of freedom, or in a greater degree merited the tribute of gratitude; and he declared he never heard a passage more applicable to the present times, than that quoted by his honorable friend (Mr. Western.) That the dean was no flatterer of great men, that he had sown the seeds of reform in the state, and that the whole body of court corruption had been the object of his attack, was much to his honor. He was not surprised that those who considered improvident loans and corrupt courts were useful to the constitution, should revile the memory of Swift in abhorrence. He recollected, some lines of a poem, called the "Libel on the Rev. Dr. Delaney, and his Excellency Lord John Carteret." where Dean Swift supposes in Ireland, for no such thing could happen here, that a minister comes with a budget full of rewards for those who support him, which, though of course not applicable now, might shew what the corruption of loans and budgets were in Dean Swift's time.

He says, after supposing a gentleman who pays his court to a minister, must perform actions contrary to his disposition, like the avenging angel in Mr. Addison's admired simile, which he repeats,—

" I'll lend you an allusion fitter,
Though flatt'ring knaves may call it bitter;
Which, if you durst but give it place,
Would shew you many a statesman's face."
* * * * *

" So to effect his Monarch's ends,
From hell a viceroy devil ascends;
His budget with corruptions cramm'd,
The contributions of the damn'd;

Which with unsparing hand he throws
Through courts and senates as he goes ;
And then at Belzebub's black hall,
Complains his budget was too small."

That a man who had so expressed his abhorrence of corruption should be detested by the abettors of that corruption, was, he repeated, not at all astonishing.

Mr. Sheridan suspected there had been a similar strewing of favors here, and the honorable gentleman opposite had come in for his share, though he certainly would not presume to say,

" From budgets with corruptions cramm'd,
The contributions of the damn'd."

He did not wish to enter much into the subject of the bill then before the house, because it did not warrant much comment. The attempt upon His Majesty was simply the pretext and stalking horse for the introduction of it, as there were certainly provisions enow for the protection of his person before ; and excepting the clause which constitutes the overawing of parliament treason, there was no new treason. If this law had been enacted some time ago, he observed, the leading part of administration would have been transported ; and, indeed, he was sorry for the country's sake that it had not. To state this more clearly, would any one deny this proposition, that when Mr. Pitt, in conjunction with the Duke of Richmond and Mr. Horne Tooke, signed the resolutions at the Thatched House for a plan of parliamentary reform, wherein he represented the house of commons to be corrupt, and not the real representation of the people, that such a proceeding might have a tendency to stir up the people to the hatred and contempt of the government ? He would ask the honorable gentleman, whether the principles of Mr. Reeves's book were not calculated to stir up hatred and contempt against the constitution ; and whether the punish-

ment pronounced in this bill would be too severe upon him? But any attempt to unmask the corruptions of government and defects of our constitution, was the evil which ministers wished to guard against; and the real object of the bill went to say, the question of a reform in parliament and existing abuses must no longer be discussed. As to any gentleman's suggesting to advise His Majesty to give a negative to the bill, from an apprehension that the passing of it would excite the resistance of the country, and lead to actual convulsion, and excite a doubt whether he might not thereby violate the conditions of his swaying the British sceptre; for his own part, he considered this would be a laudable interference on the part of some great hereditary counsellor, and would entitle him to immortal honor. Were His Majesty but to say in the house of lords, "I will consider," (*Le Roi advisera*) he might dismiss his guards, and return with the gratitude of thousands of his subjects. Mr. Sheridan said he wished to move an amendment to the clause (p. 3.) which says, "If any person within that part of Great Britain called England shall, &c." by leaving out the words, "that part of Great Britain called England," when the right honorable secretary stated, that he never stood so high with his countrymen, (and he wished him an opportunity of standing still higher) and they were loyal, and not tainted with the same seditious spirit as in England; and also, not one hundredth part of the danger existed now, which did in 1792; he would ask, whether parliament ought not to extend the merciful operation of this law to his countrymen in the north, and whether he could oppose any such amendment? In the Scotch courts, the sentence for sedition was unlimited (fourteen years had been pronounced) this bill made it seven years for the second offence.

Mr. Sheridan proposed a clause, applying the enactment of the present bill to Scotland, in order

to remove from the judges, that arbitrary and discretionary power, which they had formerly exercised.

The house divided; for the clause 27; against it 134. The bill was read a third time and passed.

DECEMBER 11.

REPORT ON THE HIGH PRICE OF CORN.

The report of the select committee appointed to take into consideration the present high price of corn was brought up, and a motion made "That the house do agree to the resolution proposed by the committee respecting an association of the members of the house, to diminish the consumption of bread made of wheat flour, &c.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, there was one point which would give him much satisfaction to hear, viz. that the proposed substitutes for the bread now in use, would prove equally nutritive; but he was afraid that was not the case. He had been informed, that in many cases, in which they had attempted to make bread of different mixtures, it had been found not only unpalatable, but unwholesome. This appeared to him a most material object; because, from the very high price of all the other articles of life, many of the laboring poor were forced to live chiefly on bread. The only remedy he saw for it was to adopt the bill which had been brought in, to increase the wages of laborers. Persons who were in a more affluent situation would be enabled to use other articles, which would diminish the unwholesome effects of this bread; but men in that low situation to which he had alluded, would not have it in their power to have recourse to any such means, unless the bill was passed for increasing their wages. With respect to the association proposed, he should object to it in its present form; not that he did not wish the object for which it was proposed, to be obtained, but because he was afraid it would set a bad precedent. If members were

once called upon in that kind of way to subscribe to a particular association, it might be extended to others of a different nature. He had no objection to the house coming to a resolution to recommend such an association, and every member in his individual capacity should recommend and enforce it by example in the place where he lived; and he certainly would do it in the parish where he lived; but he could not for one moment consent to sign the association, as at present proposed.

The resolution was put and carried.

LIBEL ON THE CONSTITUTION.

Mr. Sheridan brought up the second report from the committee appointed to inquire who was the author of a pamphlet entitled, "Thoughts on the English Government."—It was ordered to be printed.

DECEMBER 14.

LIBEL ON THE CONSTITUTION.

The order of the day for the farther consideration of the reports of the committee appointed to inquire who was the author of a libellous pamphlet entitled, "Thoughts on the English Government;" when the clerk read the second report of the committee, and the resolution of the house on the 26th of November.

MR. SHERIDAN said, after the resolution which the house had just heard, he should be much disappointed if there should appear any want of unanimity on the subject of the atrocious libel which had been so successfully traced to its source. He could not, however, help expressing an apprehension from what had fallen on a former evening from one of the right honorable gentlemen on the other side, that a difference of opinion might arise as to the mode of proceeding, and the measures which should be thought most likely to effect the ends of justice, and support the respectability of the house. When the first report was presented, it had been alleged by some, that the evidence which had been obtained

was not sufficient; by others, that it was fully sufficient to go to a direct prosecution of Mr. Reeves, either as the author, or at least, for acting as the author, of the libel; by others, that the committee had stopt short at that point, which was conceived to be the most important and necessary; but this mode of argument was founded upon a mistake, which gentlemen made as to the nature of the committee itself, which was not instituted to try a delinquent, but to inquire after, and ascertain grounds, whereupon to establish the delinquency.

Therefore, in the second report which the committee had made, in order to meet every doubt, they had taken care to leave no room for any similar objections; they had in consequence called upon Mr. John Owen, the publisher of the libel, who had been left in a very awkward situation, by the state of his evidence on the first; on the last occasion, they had questioned him if he still persisted in his refusal to give up the author, to which he replied he did, and could not think himself justifiable in doing otherwise than remaining silent; the committee had deemed this silence on the part of Mr. Owen contumacious towards the committee, and had directed him (Mr. S.) as chairman, to notify the same to the house; this, he said, having done, he could not think himself at all bound to proceed farther in the business than was agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience, which would not permit him at any time to rush upon measures that might by possibility of even the remotest kind tend to injure the freedom of the press. This freedom, he remarked, might be materially injured by either corrupting or oppressing those who were engaged in the management of an object of such delicacy and importance, taken either as the organ of liberty or of science; he had on this occasion, too, a more satisfactory reason, which was, that the author had been clearly found out, notwithstanding the confident assertions which had been made by some gen-

lemen with respect to the ignorance of Mr. Reeves of the patriotic work in question. He took notice of the situation in which Mr. Reeves stood, the distinguished protection he enjoyed, and his immediate connection with, and the little suspicion a publisher could reasonably feel, under such existing circumstances, that libellous aspersion on the house of commons, and much less doctrines tending to lop that house and the house of lords off from the trunk of the constitution, such a production would originate from such a source. He then took notice of the evidence of Mr. Thomas Wright, who had given some information concerning an association, of which the author of the libel was the chairman; from this evidence it appeared, that Mr. Reeves was the leading person of the memorable club or society of alarmists, who had set the country in a flame with the bugbear tales of plots and conspiracies, treasons hatched and hatching, of designs on the Tower and the Bank, and Jacobin clubs associated to introduce the levelling and republican systems. It might at the first glance seem that the circumstance of the chairman of such an association as that at the Crown and Anchor, being the author of that libel before the house, was of a trivial nature; but if it was considered that the chairman was himself in the constant habit of correspondence and intercourse with the Treasury, that the association at the Crown and Anchor had two thousand other societies branched off and affiliated with their mother society, and that such doctrines as the libel now before the house, by such means, obtained the most rapid, and he might say, fatal circulation through the country—when it appeared that the correspondence between Mr. Reeves's mother society and the two thousand nurseries of his principles, would make fourteen folio volumes, he thought the seriousness of such a connexion was indeed of no light consideration, but of the most dangerous and alarming. It was, of all the occurrences which had arisen since the revolu-

tion, the most alarming for the liberties of this country; that a man countenanced as he was by government, with such extensive means of disseminating such detestable doctrines, should, after having circulated the wicked principles of others through every ramification of the "Society for protecting Liberty and Property from Republicans and Levelers," be himself the author of a work, which struck at the foundation of government, which asserted the inutility of the two houses of parliament, and affirmed the sole and exclusive right of the government and the law to exist in the King. When he saw such an association, erecting itself on deception and falsehood, and maintaining itself by notorious treachery and boundless corruption: that the author of the libel upon which the house had already decided was the founder of this association, and in possession of such power, he thought it indeed an alarming crisis for this country, and a most important object for the consideration of the house, in the proceedings which they should now institute in order to punish, of which they would now make for the breach of their privileges. He then entered into a history of the Crown and Anchor association, which he said was commenced in November, 1792; and observed how remarkable it was that the nation was tranquil; no fears abroad or at home, no fears but for the issue of the war; that in one month after that society had been instituted, the nation was alarmed from one end to the other, the guards were doubled, and a host of spies were for the first time employed under the sanction of those countenanced by the King of Great Britain's ministers; arms and ammunition were provided, and the Duke of Richmond suddenly threw himself into the Tower, with all the terror that might arise from an invasion; but with what effect? After secret committees of that house had formed their reports; and after Messrs. Hardy and Tooke had been threatened with all the penalties of treason, it appeared that not even one of those hired

spies could prove a single fact in any shape resembling plot or conspiracy, after every effort of power; artifice, and corruption had been exerted to bring forward the most minute and secret expressions and actions of those who had been accused. He then noticed the system of falsehood and conscious fraud upon which Reeves's association commenced; for it appeared from Mr. Wright's evidence, that whilst they advertised that they would receive anonymous information, they added as a *nota bene*, "all letters and communications are requested to be addressed to the secretary at this place." And who was this secretary? Mr. Wright tells you that it was a man in the clouds; that it was a fiction; that no such person existed; and that even the committee did not know, nor did any one but Mr. Reeves and Mr. Wright, that it was a fictitious name. What must be thought of the credulity of that committee, and what of the conduct of him who instituted such measures, but that it was a complication of fear, of guilt, and imposture? But at the third meeting of the society it appears that the committee was informed that the secretary was a Mr. Nobody. But it could not be forgotten what effect this anonymous system had upon Mr. Thomas Law, who in a manner honorable to his head and heart, withdrew from that society, and exposed the dark principle of its institution. And we learn still farther, that the very resolutions which constitute the anonymous system, were carefully kept out of their books and open proceedings. But it was not merely this secret system of spies and informers, the invitation of anonymous information, nor the then circulation of the proceedings of that society, which contained many particulars no less libellous than the pamphlet before the house, equally inimical to the freedom of the people of this country, the privileges of both houses, and even to that title upon which alone His Majesty held his crown; but the works of Soame Jenyns, Whitaker, and Arthur Young, had been openly recommended

and circulated by that society, and the thanks of Mr. Reeves given for some of those works, in themselves treasonable to the constitution of the nation. In a work of Young's it is stated, "that the corruption of the house of commons will always increase with the power which it may be found to possess." And in the same work it is asserted, that, "by an independant parliament, is meant one that will oppose any administration; that in every constitution there are some men without conscience, some without judgment, and others without both; that by corruption those scattered characters are collected and united, and the business of government goes on smoothly;" and finally, that "an independant house of commons is no part of the British constitution." When such doctrines are circulated, and when thanks are given by the circulator to the author, it is but fair to consider those sentiments as adopted and as made his own; and when connected with the publication of the libel now before the house, the facts connected in one view, formed an attack the most hideous that this country had known for a century to be directed with this government. He lamented that the committee had not been vested with powers more ample; as he was convinced, from what he had already seen, that they could have traced the existence of a regular and deep-laid plot to introduce despotism into this country; and to have shewn, that the title assumed by that society, professedly to oppose republicans and levellers, was only a cover under which both houses of parliament were meant to be overturned, and tyranny completely established on the ruins of that little freedom which now remained to the country. He then adverted to a precedent of the year 1680, when the Judges Scroggs, Jones, and Weston, were accused of countenancing despotism, wherein one of those judges expressed himself in terms the most harsh against Luther, Calvin, and Zuinglius, and against their followers: these reformers he had said, were

men of such sharp spirits, that nothing would serve them but a parliament; but for his own part he knew of no authority to whom he could look, nor of any law but what came from the King. Such was precisely the style of Mr. Reeves and his associations; and he hoped the house would see their honor was concerned, to give such signal proof of their displeasure with respect to the author of such doctrines. He forbore to fix any farther opprobrium on the bills, which had lately passed that house; but observed that if the house marked any thing in the conduct of Mr. Reeves as unconstitutional, they could not mark it too publicly, as a guide and light for others. He could not avoid remarking, however, that by the bills which had just passed, all public meetings in future were to be under the control of magistrates; that in the last commission Mr. Reeves was made a justice of the peace; and that in Westminster the mighty movers of sedition, as they were denominated, chiefly held their meetings. Now a right honorable gentleman had thought that the paid magistrates of Westminster would not be the first to obtrude themselves at any of these meetings, and perhaps he himself might incline to that opinion. He did not think such a man as Mr. Bond, for instance, would, who always conducted himself in a fair and modest manner. He begged to be understood that he made no allusion to that gentleman's former mode of life. Whatever that might have been, when he certainly could have no expectations of his present rank, yet since he had been in office, he had always been respectable; and Mr. Sheridan thought it highly improper in the other magistrates, when he came into the commission, to refuse to associate with him, as

“The cut-purse of the empire, and the rule.”

If such magistrates as these, then, would not be the first to disperse a public meeting, who would? Why the man of all others would be Mr. Reeves.

Mr. Reeves would make himself the chief justice of seditious assemblies, the dictator of the day ; and if any person presumed to say that extravagant courts, selfish ministers, rotten boroughs, and corrupt majorities, ought to be abolished and reformed, he it is that would instantly call out to Townsend and Carpmeal, and say, " Seize that fellow by the throat, away with him to prison, he is a traitor, and proclaims sedition ;" because this man has previously declared that every one of these abuses is essential to our government. Therefore it is the duty of the house, after the passing of those bills, to hold out to the country an indemnity, by declaring that these abuses are not among the sacred parts of the constitution ; or else in every meeting they will leave no rule for the magistrate, and no means for the people, to preserve themselves from a violation of their rights. With regard to the method of proceeding against Mr. Reeves, there had been different modes ; but on that which he proposed to adopt, he hoped there would be little difference of opinion. Mr. Reeves's doctrines and associations had been more dangerous than people might at first imagine.

When such a man was found to sow divisions, was he entitled to credit ? Yet this man, from the credulity or inattention of His Majesty's ministers, had been able, by a system of fraud and imposture, to excite a degree of alarm throughout the country, which had caused that wretched disposition to tolerate the bills ; and he had been able also to provoke the prosecution of various individuals. He said he had long before exposed the falsehood of charges of plots and conspiracies. He lamented the credulity of ministers, if it was credulity, that led them to believe them, and to adopt the Machiavelian principles of using base means, to accomplish whatever they might conceive to be good ends, which he believed, when their imagination had been disturbed by the artifices of Mr. Reeves, was really and truly the case, from what had fallen from a right honor-

able gentleman, who had asserted that Mr. Reeves deserved the gratitude of the country, and that he had been its saviour; but after what had been proved to the committee, as brought forward in the report, united with the support given by Mr. Reeves to similar doctrines, he should be sorry, though not surprised, to hear again. He then mentioned, he said, the fifth time in the house, another plot which had sprung from the association—he meant the Pop-gun plot, as it was called, which, often as he had noticed it, had never once been noticed or replied to from the other side of the house. He stated that two persons, J. Smith and G. Higgins, were seized and committed upon the following order of the Privy Council, signed by Lord Loughborough and William Pitt:—

These are in His Majesty's name to authorise and require you to receive into your custody the body of John Smith, herewith sent you for high treason; and you are to keep him safe and close until he shall be delivered by due course of law; and for so doing this shall be your sufficient warrant. From the Council Chamber at Whitehall, this 10th day of October, 1794.

To the Keeper of Newgate.

From that time to the 10th of May, through the whole of an unusually severe winter, they were confined in cold and miserable cells, and the families of both reduced to the greatest distress. At the period when he (Mr. Sheridan) was about to propose the repeal of the act for suspending the Habeas Corpus act, one of the persons, Smith, wrote him the following letter, which would speak for itself:—

FELONS' SIDE.

Sir,

Newgate, Jan. 5, 1795.

Seeing in the public papers that you intend this day to move for leave to bring in a bill to repeal the suspension of the Habeas Corpus act, I take the liberty of sending you an account of my situation. On the 28th of September I was taken into custody by a warrant from the Secretary of State, and thrown into a dismal cell in New Prison, Clerkenwell, from thence I was taken to the Privy Council, and there examined several times. From the questions put to me, it appears that I was charged as being concerned in the plot for assassinating His Majesty. I can assure you, Sir, on the word of a man, that I never heard, saw, or knew any thing of the said plot, till I was in the

Privy Council. On the 10th of October, I was committed to this place on a charge of high treason, without any hope of being brought to trial, having been dragged from home, leaving a wife and four small children without any support, and having lost a place of above sixty pounds a year. I am at this time in a dismal cell in Newgate, where nothing is to be heard but the rattling of irons from the felons; my friends cannot come to see me without being robbed, having to pass through a yard in which are some of the most abandoned of wretches. The above I can assure you are facts.

By taking public notice of the above, you will much oblige

Your obedient humble servant,

TO R. B. SHERIDAN, Esq.

JOHN SMITH.

In this condition did this man and the other solicit trial, dismissal, or enlargement on bail; for it is to be observed of them, that confiding in their own innocence, even with the aggravating circumstances of family distress, they asked no other favor but trial or discharge; but neither was granted them. Mr. Smith wrote again in February, but no answer was sent. A respectable man (Mr. Parkinson) went to see him; found him in a state truly desperate, and with a dignity of heart that reflects the highest credit on him, represented the poor man's case to the privy council, which only procured a change of apartments; and in April he wrote again; and he was informed, that a milder letter would procure his release on any bad bail whatever. Thus a man, after the destruction of his property, the danger of his life by imprisonment, and the misery of a numerous family, is told by his oppressors you must not be a man, you must cease to feel like an Englishman: you must not dare, after the torment and distress we have heaped on you, to speak but as a slave, and lick the feet of those who have trod upon you, and proved that the tyrannical days of the French government, or of the worst tyranny that ever existed, were not worse than what an Englishman is liable to under the abuse of the law. He believed that such proceedings as had taken place never could have been tolerated, if the minds of the people had not been previously poisoned, and that principally under the mask of loyalty, by this

man ; and when this proceeded from a corrupt motive, though he carried little personal animosity out of that house, he felt no mercy for him. He did not wish to touch a hair of the heads of either printer or publisher ; but when he considered all the consequences that had followed from the system of prosecutions, particularly the unhappy fate of Messrs. Muir and Palmer, and Mr. Winterbotham, with a number of other persons, down to the poor man who was imprisoned for playing *çai-ra* upon his organ, he thought no measures were too strong, no punishment too severe. He did not mean, however, to move for a prosecution, though he had no mistrust of the honorable and learned gentleman opposite (the Attorney-General). He put it to the house, whether they ought not to measure equal justice for a conspiracy to lop off the Lords and Commons, as for a conspiracy to depose the King ; and observed, that all the precedents went to this point, where there was a high breach of the privilege of parliament. The pamphlet was not a theoretical treatise on government, but a practical exhortation, addressed to the plain sense of the people. What he proposed therefore was to move for the censure of the house, and to proclaim that censure, by having the pamphlet burnt by the hands of the common hangman. He objected to a prosecution most peremptorily, as he wished to set an example of lenity and mercy, contrary to what Mr. Reeves himself practised ; but thought it was with great reluctance he submitted to the ministers themselves whether this should not be followed up by an address to His Majesty to remove him from any place of trust ; and instead of committing him to Newgate, he designed to move, that he should be summoned to attend at the bar of that house, to receive a reprimand from the Speaker, and be recommended to make a disavowal of his sentiments. He concluded with moving “ That one of the said printed books be burnt by the hands of the common

hangman in the New Palace-yard, Westminster, on Monday, the 21st day of this instant December, at one of the clock in the afternoon; and that another of the said printed books be burnt by the hands of the common hangman before the Royal Exchange in London, on Tuesday, the 22d day of this instant December, at the same hour; and that the Sheriffs of London and Middlesex do attend at the said time and places respectively, and cause the same to be burnt there accordingly."

Mr. Dundas followed, and moved an amendment to leave out all but the first word of the motion, and in its place to substitute, "That an humble address be presented to His Majesty, humbly to desire His Majesty that he will be graciously pleased to give directions to his Attorney-General to prosecute John Reeves, Esq., as the author or publisher of a printed pamphlet, intituled, "Thoughts on the English Government—addressed to the quiet good sense of the people of England, in a series of letters—Letter the first, on the National Character of Englishmen—The Nature of the English Government—The Corruptions caused in both by the Introduction of French Principles—The Effects produced by the Reformation and the Revolution upon Political Principles—The Conduct of the Whig Party—The Character of the modern Democrats.—London, printed for J. Owen, No. 168, Piccadilly, 1795."

Mr. Sheridan replied to the several arguments that had been advanced against him. As to the charge, that he and his friends had never recommended prosecutions for libels, he would say, it was not necessary. Ministers had taken that matter into their own hands; the jails throughout the kingdom had been full. Here Mr. Sheridan read over a list of fifty or sixty persons, who had, in the course of these three last years, been tried and punished for libels; and many of these had been prosecuted in consequence of informations from Mr. Reeves's association, which he could prove: so it could be no reproach to opposition that they had not urged ministers to increase the list. If he did not wish to send Mr. Reeves to a jury, he did not wish to commit the privileges of the house to the King's Attorney-General. If Mr. Reeves should be found guilty, perhaps the right honorable gentleman

would call him a convicted innocent, as he had called others acquitted felons.

The question was then put on the proposed omission of the words of Mr. Sheridan's motion, which was carried without a division. It being then supposed that the subject was disposed of, the greater part of the members had left the house before the question could be put on the words proposed to be inserted by Mr. Dundas; and, on Sir William Dolben's requiring a division, it appeared that only twenty-nine members were present, and in consequence an adjournment took place.

DECEMBER 15.

LIBEL ON THE CONSTITUTION.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that in consequence of some arguments used the night before, which had in some measure altered his mind, he no longer objected to the prosecution of Mr. Reeves, since it was to be limited to himself, without affecting the printer or publisher of the pamphlet. In order, therefore, that there might be unanimity in the house, respecting the manner of punishing the author of that pamphlet, on which the house had already passed an unanimous resolution of reprobation, he would move, "That an humble address be presented to His Majesty, that he would be graciously pleased to order His Majesty's Attorney-General to prosecute John Reeves, Esq. as the author of a printed pamphlet, intituled, "Thoughts on the English Government."

Agreed to, nem. con.

LOAN.

Mr. Smith moved, "That a committee be appointed to enquire into the circumstances of the negotiation of the late loan." Mr. Dundas adverted to an expression which was uttered by Mr. Smith, with respect to Lord North: he wished to know, if he seriously imputed corruption to that nobleman. Mr. Smith professed, that he did not mean the slightest reference to that nobleman, but the transaction was notorious during his administration, that probably through his agents, a loan was made the medium of influencing a majority of the members of the house.

Mr. Sheridan observed, personal corruption never had been urged against the noble lord, though it had always been understood that he made the loans the means of influencing a majority. This was a parliamentary accusation against him ; and it had not only been urged, but proved. If the right honorable gentleman disputed this assertion, he would refer him to the journals, where he would find that a committee of enquiry had been appointed ; that the lists of the subscribers to the loan were produced and examined ; and it was proved the loan had been dealt and sold out to members of parliament. The right honorable gentleman took fire at the imputation on the noble lord ; but he rather attributed his zeal to his solicitude, lest an inference should be drawn from the conduct of that noble lord, as an insinuation against the present ministers. It had been the uniform practice of the house, indeed, to acquit the right honorable gentlemen opposite of personal corruption in the negotiation of this loan ; but he knew no reason why he was to do so, nor why he was to assume that he was not liable to as foul an imputation for the foul distributions of the present loan, as the noble lord was for that foul loan which he took fire at. They are two distinct things, to say the minister has no part of the bonus himself, and to say he has not contrived to make a distribution to others. He knew that in 1783, when he was Secretary of the Treasury, that Lord John Cavendish put out the loan into the hands of his enemies, instead of his friends, because he was determined to act upon the purest principles, by which means he was disappointed in his instalments, and made a bad loan for the public ; and a charge was, nevertheless, brought against him, insinuating that he had been governed by corrupt motives. Mr. Sheridan said, when he saw the loan now made replete with falsehood, trick, and connivance, he knew no reason why he was not to suspect the ministers of having acted

improperly. He hoped the enquiry was not to be made by an upstairs committee, or a committee of the right honorable gentleman's own selection; but a committee of the whole house; and he thought it would not be a free enquiry, if it were otherwise; for if any management or selection were made, he would not think the right honorable gentleman really serious in his declarations. He wished to follow up the precedent of that loan which had been alluded to under the administration of Lord North, whom he owned he could not consider as a model of perfect purity, though he acknowledged his good humor, urbanity, and private worth. In the list produced on that occasion, the bankers were the first subscribers, as now; though the noble lord in the blue riband, as Mr. Pitt on the present occasion had done, professed he knew nothing of the distribution. After them came a variety of subaltern agents; and he asked whether the right honorable gentleman could not look around him, and point out who were the subaltern agents in the present loan? He must think them children, if he pretended to the contrary. There were many who had 10,000*l.* shares each with cent. per cent. profit; and if he denied it, his political tutor would tell him it was trifling with the house. He hoped, therefore, a motion would be made, first for the list of the contractors, and then for the subordinate lists of the bankers; here he begged leave to state some facts as he received them, from rumour, though he believed them to have been raised upon a sure foundation. The Lord Mayor, whom he was happy to see in his place, if the statement was false he might contradict it, was said to have two millions of the loan. Now it was to be remarked, that his lordship had formerly admitted the assembly of his constituents in the common hall of the City of London to be fair and legal, and he understood from the sense of the majority, his lordship promised to oppose the bills; but, when the subsequent meeting of

the bankers and loan-mongers was held, his Lordship retracted his former opinion, and considered this meeting of the bankers was the criterion for him to go by. On these grounds he thought he had a right to fasten a suspicion on the distribution of the loan. He conceived much irrelevant matter had been introduced in the course of the discussion; but observed, it was not a light matter for the house simply to consider whether the right honorable gentleman did or did not know, on the 25th of November, whether the French were already in possession of that order of things, or in the course of obtaining that order of things, which could justify a negotiation for peace? Could any human being in the shape of a politician, or with the name of a statesman, and holding his head up as the ruler of a kingdom, solemnly affirm he did not know that circumstance?

Now was it asserted that the rapid decay of the finances of France and the victories of the Austrians had produced the rise of stock; yet, at the opening of the budget, the right honorable gentleman declared that the French were not only on the verge, but in the very gulph of bankruptcy, and thus by sinking "lower than the lowest deep" he lost himself. This argument was consequently against himself; for while he pretended that France was on the eve of a revolution; he came forward with another proposition, that the order of things in that country was favorable for a treaty—If he had heard such drivelling nonsense in any one of the sixpenny societies, which the right honorable gentleman had abolished, he should have treated it as the inconsistency of one of the most vulgar and most confused minds. The right honorable gentleman had taken care to win away the deliberation of the house from a fair examination of the case, by his two and sixpenny and three and fourpenny schemes, which, as usual, he rendered as compli-

cated as possible. Mr. Sheridan, therefore, begged leave to recal the attention of the house to the main argument, by asking whether it was a fact, after having waged war and carried it on for four years, to establish a certain form of government in France, and where of course it must be inferred that ministers constantly watched every change, that the right honorable gentleman had not made some estimate on the probable duration of the present government when he bargained for the loan? One might have supposed from his declarations, the present council of five hundred did not elect themselves; and that four out of the five members of the council of the antients, had not imbrued their hands in the blood of their sovereign. Yet the reverse was the fact. Adverting to that situation, therefore, which the right honorable gentleman had so long and so unfortunately held, the house was first to determine whether he could not, and ought not to have bargained better for the public by accelerating His Majesty's message, or by postponing the loan, and getting a vote of credit for two millions? He thought there was a variety of matters connected with it, such as related to Mr. Morgan, &c. all important in themselves, but comparatively little to this consideration; and unless the right honorable gentleman could acquit himself of the imputation, he considered there were grounds for a serious suspicion;—if he was not guilty himself of personal corruption, he had at least, through the means of particular agents, used one of the most pernicious of bribes which was resorted to in the most corrupt of governments.

The motion was carried without a division.

FEBRUARY 21, 1796.

VOTE OF CREDIT BILL.

The order of the day was read for the third reading of this bill. Mr. Grey moved " That it be postponed till that day three weeks.

Mr. SHERIDAN remarked, that it tended to destroy the power of the house of commons over the public purse, as well as the jealousy which in all cases of public expenditure they should be cautious to preserve. It was the peculiar privilege of that house, always to vote the money for the public services upon estimates which were to be calculated as nearly as possible to the several demands of the several departments; and in cases of war and emergency at the end of a session, to provide for any extraordinary incident by a vote of credit. He observed, the right honorable gentleman had very studiously passed over one objection of his honorable friend, who made the motion for delay, which, was the magnitude of the present demand, when compared with what had been the case under former administrations. Till the right honorable gentleman introduced the practice, a vote of credit never exceeded the sum of one million; and if he goes on doubling at this rate, unnoticed and unchecked, why may he not next year, if the war continues, come down for five millions at once. He understood that the right honorable gentleman made no manner of distinction between the money granted by a vote of credit, and that granted upon the estimates for the common current expences of the year. In this case, the estimates are no longer of any use, since there is no certainty of approbation. By the laws of his country, the right honorable gentleman, and every other minister, was bound not to apply the money voted upon any specific estimate to any other purpose, and constitutionally he could not do it. Yet, according to his own account, he puts all the money into one purse, and

makes use of it as occasion needs. Now, to shew how opposite such a mode of proceeding is to the very plea upon which the money was required, he desired the preamble to the bill to be read. This being done, Mr. Sheridan observed, upon that plea, it was to defray some unforeseen expenses. He owned the delay of the bill might create much inconvenience, but that inconvenience was the lesser evil of the two, and he was, therefore, resolved to take the sense of the house upon it.

The house then divided—for Mr. Grey's motion 25 ; against it 102. The bill was then read a third time and passed.

EXPEDITION TO THE WEST INDIES.

Mr. Sheridan gave notice, that soon after his honorable friend had made his motion concerning the expenses of the war, he should specifically move for an enquiry into the conduct of the expedition to the West Indies. Upon a former occasion the right honorable gentleman had invited it, and expressed himself ready to meet it, and he hoped the house was not so benumbed by despair and disappointment, as to suffer an affair so replete with disaster and disgrace, to pass unnoticed.

FEBRUARY 26.

MR. WILLIAM SMITH'S MOTION RESPECTING THE LOAN,

The first resolution being put, viz. "That it appears to this house that the principle of making loans for the public service by free and open competition uniformly professed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been very generally recognized as affording the fairest prospect of public advantage." To this an amendment was proposed by Mr. Sylvester Douglas, "That it appears to this house, that the principle of making loans for the public service by competition, which was introduced, and has in general been acted upon, by the present Chancellor of the Exchequer, has been productive in many instances of great public advantage; but that this principle could not be applied in its full extent, to the bargain for the late loan, consistently with the peculiar circumstances of the case, and with that attention

to the equitable claims of individuals, which ought always to be shewn in transactions with them on behalf of the public."

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that oppressed as he was by a severe cold, he should not have intruded upon the patience of the house, but for something which was said in the course of the debate by the honorable and learned gentleman who moved the amendment; his expressions were so pointedly directed to him that he could not sit totally silent, although he was hardly able to speak. The honorable gentleman in authoritative phrase, declared, that he gave him (Mr. Sheridan) an opportunity of retracting what he had said on a former occasion. He was always ready to retract any thing spoken wrongfully or unadvisably; but he congratulated himself that he preserved consistency in his declarations;—he was not in the habit of retracting, like gentlemen opposite to him; nor did he find the necessity of so doing. Some gentlemen had, indeed, retracted their former principles and opinions. Whether it were from avarice or ambition, he could not tell; but these gentlemen were in the habit of striking a balance between their interest and their professions; they were accustomed, therefore, in accommodating as well as retracting. It was from a speech of his, the printed copy of which he saw in the hands of gentlemen at the other side, that all the clamor had arisen of aspersions cast on the purity and integrity of the minister. He had certainly intimated, that some *rouleaus* of this immense profit had found their way in that house. The fact was certain. It had been admitted by the Lord Mayor, who had obligingly corrected him as to the amount of his share. He had erroneously stated it at two millions. It was by the receiver's declaration 2,800,000*l*. There was no possibility of doubt, but that some of this oil of infinnence had been sent to grease that squeaking wheel in the city, called the mercantile interest! Every method had been taken to draw the attention of the house, in this instance, from the main ques-

tion. No corruption had been suggested by Mr. Smith. The right honorable Chancellor of the Exchequer had come with a boast of honorable acquittal by the committee, and had said that gentlemen at his side of the house attended it;—it was true, they had so. His honorable friend (Mr. Grey) and himself had gone there; for his part he never went after the first day, nor did the report contain his sentiments. The gentlemen at his side of the house wanted a committee of the whole house, in order that the witnesses might be examined before the world, or else a select committee, composed of equal numbers from each side of the house. Either of these would have been a fair mode of proceeding, and have shewn a disposition to impartial investigation; but in the committee which pondered on that mighty loan, the opposition had not the honors of the sitting as active citizens. A committee was appointed, in which the accused parties became the judges of their principal. The First Lord of the Treasury was tried by his Secretary, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer by a half pay master! He was in a worse state even than an acquitted felon. He was tried by a band of placemen, and had been acquitted only by his accomplices! The right honorable gentleman in granting the committee, seemed to be wounded in pride and spirit. The attempt to institute an enquiry was a tax upon his purity; suspicion touched him in the pinching part, and he reluctantly complied. If the right honorable gentleman would recollect, that in the year 1783, he wanted an enquiry into the circumstances of the loan made by Lord John Cavendish, for winning the expenses of the American war; delicacy would not, perhaps, be so much offended at the enquiry now made; particularly, if he considered how much worse the present loan was for the public in its terms, and in the manner of its negociation. The circumstance of the Hamburgh bills was degrading to the dignity of a great nation; it proved that the government was

reduced to their last shift; it was a matter of despicable accommodation, which shrunk from the light. The bills were illegal, they were intrinsically worth nothing, for they were drawn by nobody; and constituted a bankruptcy against the government which issued them. How strange that the right honorable gentleman should support his domineering pretensions in the war against France, by arguments drawn from the ruin of the enemy's finances; they being, as he expressed it, in the gulf of national bankruptcy, when he himself was caught revelling in its vortex. Mr. Sheridan concluded by declaring, that he would vote for the resolutions of his honorable friend.

The house divided on the amendment; ayes 171; noes 23.—All the other resolutions of Mr. Smith were regulated by the previous question, without a division.

MARCH 16.

LONDON WET DOCK BILL.

Mr. Manwaring moved "That the bill be now read a second time," Alderman Lushington moved an amendment, "That this day four months do stand in the place of the word now." The Lord Mayor seconded the amendment.

Mr. SHERIDAN agreed with the worthy magistrates in almost every thing they had said. It was incumbent upon the house to hear counsel for the parties who petitioned against the bill; and time at least should be granted for this purpose. He saw no reason to doubt the sincerity of the city in wishing to bring forward a plan. The example of the conduct of the city on a former occasion, the honorable gentleman had brought forward upon the principle laid down in a celebrated pamphlet of late, that of visiting the sins of the ancestors upon their posterity; and it was only on this view that the Corporation of London could be implicated in the folly of their predecessors. It might be argued, that any

plan of this nature would injure the City of London ; as West-India merchants might assert that the abolition of the slave trade would ruin the trade with the colonies ; and as it had been argued some years ago, that the commerce of this country would suffer by giving a free trade to Ireland,—a prediction falsified by the event ; but arguments of this kind with him went for little or nothing. If the object could be effected with the consent of the City, he was convinced that merchants would not refuse the accommodation on these terms. It was said that 10 per cent. was not too high !—Indeed the honorable gentleman might not consider it a very great profit, when 10 per cent. was gained upon a loan. The losses through plundering surely must be very considerable, when a new word was made from the frequency of the fact ; and surely this was not a loss that the wet-docks were calculated to remedy.—But the great question, since it was agreed that some plan was necessary, was, whether the purpose might not be as well answered by the city plan ? There was something at first view very unfavorable in this bill : though holding out to be a private bill, it permitted very considerable sums to be levied from all British ships, although the accommodation would be confined chiefly to the West-India merchants.—That 1700 houses should be pulled down, and 10,000 persons forced to seek new habitations, was such desolation at the commencement of a plan of improvement, as did not bespeak much favor. The ultimate effect certainly would be, to diminish the value of houses all over the City of London, and in time to attract the Exchange, the Custom-house, &c. to the place where the docks were to be made. He should have wished that a month or six weeks, or such a period, had been proposed for the delay of the bill, that time might be allowed, as well to hear counsel of parties interested, as to bring forward any other plans that might be in agitation.

Mr. Pitt moved, "*That instead of the words this day four months, be inserted the words, Wednesday, the 11th of April next.*"—*This was agreed to.*

MARCH 20.

MAROON WAR IN JAMAICA.

General Macleod moved, "*That an humble address be presented to His Majesty, that he may be pleased to order, that there be laid before this house a copy of all the correspondence of which government is in possession, relative to the mode of carrying on war against the Maroons in Jamaica.*"

Mr. SHERIDAN did not think it necessary to trouble the house long on the present question, after what had fallen from the honorable Secretary (Mr. Dundas). It gave him the greatest satisfaction to hear that government had ordered an enquiry to be made into this transaction immediately after the report of it came to their knowledge. But he had heard with much concern what fell from an honorable gentleman near him (Mr. Barham), because it carried with it the idea of extirpating a whole race of people. This he could not sufficiently reprobate; and surely the savage means used to overcome those unfortunate men were not necessary, when their number was stated so low as four or five hundred. It was surprising, that without the abominable aid of blood-hounds, the whole force of Jamaica could not succeed in subduing those unfortunate Maroons, who, by oppression, the breach of treaty on the part of the English, and in vindication of their rights, had been driven to take up arms. So far, by the blessing of God, at least the resistance of a minority acting on just principles in one quarter of the globe was at least formidable. The honorable gentleman who spoke last, asserts, that they were not to be treated as Maroons but rebels. Now it seems that the resistance of an independent nation, with whom this country signed a solemn treaty, which it afterwards violated, was to be considered as a state of

rebellion. But there was no ground which could justify the use of blood-hounds; and it was unnecessary for him to state what the house well knew, that it was not only just but politic, to abate as much as possible the rigors and horrors of war. The present objects of the war in Jamaica, seemed to be the extirpation of this unhappy people, or to drive them by cruelty, to nourish such a resentment of their wrongs, as to render them incapable, in future, of observing amity or good will towards their enemy. The honorable gentleman opposite to him seemed to consider it as of little importance whether the war was just on our part or not. He was of a contrary opinion. The idea of extermination, always horrid and unjust, was certainly much aggravated, if it turned out that these people were at war with us merely because they had been injured. The Maroons were, in fact, an independant people.— They were a useful race, and even in a commercial view were of considerable advantage to the country. The honorable gentleman had mentioned the origin of the war, but he had not stated all the circumstances. It originated in a Maroon stealing a pig: but his punishment was a violation of a treaty which subsisted between the British settlers and the people. He was whipped. The man returned with the stripes on his back to his nation. It was an article of the treaty that no Maroon should be punished by the government of Jamaica: but if he committed a crime that he should be given up to his own nation for punishment. In the present case this article was evidently infringed. Redress was demanded by the Maroons, and as no redress was given, war followed. For the honor of the national character, it was necessary that an enquiry should be instituted. If the Maroons were injured, a war of extermination could not be contemplated without the utmost horror. He hoped, however, that something would be done to bring back this people to that state of harmony and good will which had been

found so necessary for the peace, and, in some degree, to the prosperity of the island.

The motion was withdrawn.

APRIL 13.

PAPERS RELATIVE TO THE WEST-INDIA
EXPEDITION.

MR. SHERIDAN said, that he had come down on purpose to move for certain papers relative to the West-India expedition. He was encouraged to think that they would not be refused, when he recollected the desire which had been expressed, at a former period, for a full and impartial enquiry into the subject. If the prospect of peace had been nearer, than at present it appeared to be, it might be said that such an enquiry would be instituted with greater propriety, after the re-establishment of tranquillity; but in the prospect of continuing in the same calamitous course in which we had hitherto proceeded, and under the same weak and blundering councils by which we had been guided, an enquiry into past errors became more necessary than ever. He was surprised to find, since he came to the house, that the King's ministers had any objection to the production of these papers. He should, however, now move that they be laid before the house; and if they were refused, he would name a future day for the discussion. Mr. Sheridan then moved for a string of papers relative to the West-India expedition; among which were,

An account of the number of men sent out to the West Indies, under Sir Charles Grey, in the close of the year 1793.

An account of the number of men drawn from this expedition, and placed under the command of Lord Moira.

An account of the number of men taken from Sir

Charles Grey, after the conquest of Martinique and Guadeloupe, and sent to St. Domingo.

A return of the reinforcements sent out to St. Domingo, with the dates of their sailing and of their arrival.

A copy of all the letters which were written by Admiral Christian and General Abercrombie, respecting the delay of the West-India expedition.

An account of the mortality of the troops lying on board the transports while they remained at Portsmouth.

An account of the number of ships foundered, and of the men that were lost after they had sailed.

And a copy of the letter for the appointment of a board to superintend the transport service.

Mr. Dundas objected to the motions, and Mr. Sheridan proposed to adjourn the debate to Tuesday sennight; which was agreed to by the house.

APRIL 18.

LETTER OF THE COUNT DE SOMBREUIL WITH
RESPECT TO THE UNFORTUNATE EXPEDITION
TO QUIBERON.

MR. SHERIDAN rose to move for the production of a paper which had before been moved for by an honorable friend of his (General Tarleton), and had been refused. After that refusal, the house might judge of his surprise and astonishment when he saw the letter of the Count de Sombreuil, published to-day in the *True Briton*. He did not hesitate a moment to pronounce that publication authentic and genuine, being influenced in his opinion both by the complexion of the journal in which it was published, and the particular features of the letter itself. He spoke in the recollection of those persons who heard his honorable friend move for the production of that letter, and he reminded them that his honorable friend assigned as his reason for doing so, that it might be

possible the letter contained not only an exculpation of the Comte de Sombreuil himself, but a crimination of those persons who advised and conducted the unfortunate expedition in which he perished. He appealed to the recollection also of the house, as well as to the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Windham) who refused the motion, that the production of the paper was refused because it related solely to a business of a delicate and private nature. How completely then was he disappointed and astonished on perusing the copy published in the *True Briton*, which he had every reason to believe authentic, to find it so far from relating exclusively to any business of a private nature, to belong entirely to matters of public moment; and the only excuse he could alledge for the right honorable gentleman's not having made such a declaration was, that he had either read it in a slight and cursory manner, or from the distance of time, and the multiplicity of business in which he was engaged, that he had wholly forgotten its contents, or it would be impossible that he should have given it such a color. For it did not appear from this letter, that there was any paltry recrimination upon the persons who advised and conducted that unfortunate expedition, but a foundation for a charge of the most marked criminality. It might be true that the right honorable gentleman had not the sole hand in that expedition, or that he had no farther share in advising it than the rest of his colleagues; but whoever were the authors and abettors of it, there was very clear evidence that there was not one word about any business of a private nature in the letter from Portsmouth; while there were expressions which conveyed the strongest condemnation of sending that expedition out in the most gross, the most treacherous manner. He undertook, however, to read the letter to the house, in which he could find nothing, even by construction, of a private nature.

TRANSLATION OF THE FIRST LETTER.

On board the *John*, Portsmouth Road,
July 8, 1795.

SIR,

The short stay which I made at London, not having permitted me the honor of seeing you more than once, and my sudden departure having prevented me from conversing with you on several points of importance to me in my present situation. I have sufficient confidence in your sagacity to be convinced, that I shall find such instructions as will serve me for a guide, and enable me to support the responsibility attached to my conduct, as well towards you as towards the troops under my command.

A full conviction of the necessity of subordination, joined to a zealous devotion to the cause in which I have embarked, induce me to fly with precipitation at the first signal I receive, and never allow me to urge the smallest objection. I say nothing of the discretion which a government has a right to expect from those it employs; I have long since given sufficient proofs of mine; and I have reason to believe, that they are such as will enable me to obtain, at least, those marks of confidence which are due to my situation.

I have the honor to observe to you, Sir, that I am going with troops, of whose destination I know nothing but by public report; neither am I acquainted with their means of subsistence, nor, in the smallest degree, with the rules by which I am to regulate my conduct. What will be necessary, with regard to ammunition, with which I am not, to my knowledge, provided, and with regard to the support of those with whom I am to act; the means by which I am to carry on my correspondence with you, in a distant situation; and from whom I am, in all cases, to receive orders.—These are points on which I request you to give me such instructions as will serve as a basis for my conduct.

I had the honor also to request that you will let me have an officer from the department of inspection.—If you send me such a person, pray choose a man who speaks both languages, that he may, on occasion, assist me in the translation of your letters; and that your orders may only be known to an officer chosen by government. I have the honor to be, with respect,

Your very humble servant,

COUNT CHARLES DE SOMBREVILLE.

This was the private letter, he said, which the right honorable gentleman had stated to be interesting to the writer's feelings only, and not at all so to the public. And now he would read the other, addressed to the right honorable gentleman, which accompanied that to Sir John Borlase Warren, and which was represented to be sent to him as a testimony of particular respect and gratitude:—

TRANSLATION OF THE SECOND LETTER.

From the Count de Sombreuil to the right honorable William Windham, dated Aurai, 22nd of July, 1795, received by the hands of his servant, who remained with him till the hour of his death.

SIR,

The letter which I have written to Sir John Warren will give you every information in my power to afford, as well on my present situation, as on past events; I will not remind you of the letter which I wrote to you from Portsmouth, as you doubtless feel the force of the remarks which I there made: you must be sensible how much my heart has to suffer in these last moments; independently of the regret which I experience for the fate of my companions, you know what sacrifices an order so prompt obliged me to make.

I request you, Sir, to be so kind as to give to the bearer, a faithful man, who has never abandoned me (and whom the losses I have sustained incapacitate me from rewarding), the sum of five hundred louis, to be shared with my other servants.—This request will not appear indiscreet, as I have lost several government securities to a greater amount.

I also recommend to you, Sir, the two persons about whom I spoke to you before I left London.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

To Mr. Windham,
Secretary at War.

Your very humble servant,
COUNT CHARLES DE SOMBREUIL.

Now the house would connect the remarks there made with those in the preceding letter, and perceive what general affinity there was to business of a private nature. This letter displayed all the characteristics of a brave mind; it did not reproach the right honorable gentleman for his conduct, but it reminded him of the remarks in the former letter—That he was dispatched with troops upon an expedition, of the destination of which he was ignorant; that he was ignorant also of the particulars relative to their command, their subsistence, and their ammunition. Here was none of that whistle-whattling stuff which the right honorable gentleman had pretended, and only a couple of lines which could be construed to relate to that beautiful and accomplished woman to whom his affections had been pledged, and who had since been reported to be disordered in her mind. He concluded, that when a man of such worth, valor, and honor, was

ready to perish in what he conceived to be a just cause, it was a shame and a reproach to His Majesty's ministers, to abandon him, as they had done, to his fate ; and, conceiving that these letters contained the strongest proofs of the gross and scandalous manner in which the expedition to the coast of France had been conducted, he moved, " That copies of the letters written by Count Charles de Sombreuil, to the Secretary at War, be laid upon the table."

Mr. Pitt moved the order of the day.

Mr. Sheridan declined taking the advantage which this notion gave him of speaking again at length. From the tone and manner of the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Windham), if he had not claimed the privilege of an angry man, he should have suspected the right honorable gentleman supposed that high words would go for proof and argument. He wished him, when his anger was diminished, to read the letters over again, as he might perceive his present construction to be erroneous. He concurred with his honourable friend (Gen. Smith) in the idea, that if Sombreuil had known that Puisaye was to command the expedition, it was possible he might not have left England. The calamity that attended that expedition he attributed solely to the division of counsels ; for the coward, Puisaye, secured his retreat, while the other brave companions of his voyage were left victims to his treachery.

The motion for the order of the day was put, and carried without a division.

The house then went into a committee of

WAYS AND MEANS.

Mr. Sheridan begged the attention of the committee only a few minutes, for he would not enter at large on the various topics that had been brought under consideration. He would first observe, that

the complaint of monied men, at not being permitted to contribute their share to relieve the necessities of the state, was a sufficient proof of the flourishing condition of our resources, and left no necessity for eloquence to declaim on the contrast between our situation and that of the enemy. 'They were obliged to have recourse to violence to extort a forced loan, while monied gentlemen among us, with the generous impulse of patriotic magnanimity, were rivalling the Roman Curtius, and vying with each other who should first plunge into the unfathomable gulph of the sinking fund. He alluded to the many financial contests that had taken place between him and the right honorable gentleman; and it was of importance that he had recorded his opinion on the journals of the house. The right honorable gentleman, after having long attempted to delude the house, had, at last, come over to his opinion. Questions of finance were not fit subjects for declamation and eloquence. When peace was obtained, he would undertake to prove, that, instead of a surplus million, the peace establishment could not be under twenty-three millions. He stated the expenditure of the peace establishment of 1783, at seventeen millions; and if, during nine years' peace, it had never decreased from this, he had a right to assume that if, at the end of this war, the peace establishment was twenty-three millions, it could not be less for the next nine years. The long-proposed day, when the revenue of the country was to be equal to its expenditure, had never yet come, and he verily believed never would come.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer's resolutions were put, and agreed to without a division.

APRIL 21.

WEST INDIA EXPEDITION.

Mr. SHERIDAN moved, that the adjourned debate, on the papers for which he moved on a former night, respecting the war in the West Indies, be now resumed.

Mr. Pitt said, he doubted whether he had any right to say any thing to the honorable gentleman's motion for these papers, except that he should not vote for laying them before the house, as he had on the former night delivered his sentiments upon the question.

Mr. Sheridan observed, he was considerably surprised that the minister should make such an attempt to prevent the discussion of this subject. The minister had said to-night, that he had already animadverted against granting these papers to the house. He could not recollect any thing that was said by the right honorable gentleman upon this subject that looked like an argument. When the subject was before the house, he said the debate should be adjourned, in order that it might be debated ; and now it was brought forward, he said he would not consent to granting the information that was desired. This was all the argument of the right honorable gentleman. He understood that the minister wanted time to prepare himself for this matter. He had that time, for the debate was adjourned ; but he had made very bad use of his time, for he had now nothing to say, except that he was not in the humour to give the house any information on the subject. This was part of the minister's plan. There had, of late, been some endeavours which had been hitherto too much successful, to introduce into that house a very novel and a very bad practice, by which the minister superseded the inquisitorial power of that assembly ; it was to refuse to the house all means of preliminary information, when on the face of the matter there was ground for inquiry

into his conduct, and when perhaps the result of that inquiry would be his own complete disgrace. This practice was intirely unknown to former parliaments, and contrary to the established practice of the house of commons ; but it would be a very convenient thing to the minister if he could establish this novel practice ; for it tended to conceal his blunders, and to prevent the house from recording his incapacity. We should find that it was the constant practice of parliament in all former wars, when such information was moved for, to grant it in the first instance. This was the constant practice of Lord North during the American war. No papers were then withheld from the house, except such as by their publication might create danger to the government, or to the public : and such no man of sense would ever wish to be published. But the reverse was the case with the present minister, for he made it a standing rule to refuse every paper, excepting there was some proof that an inquiry ought to follow the information, and that there was ground to charge Administration with misconduct. With the present minister, therefore, granting a paper which conveyed any information was the same thing as granting an inquiry. But in reality it was no such thing ; he was not bound to move for an inquiry after these papers were granted ; and that for the plainest of all reasons, for the papers when they appeared, might intirely justify the minister in his conduct throughout the transactions to which the papers relate ; and therefore it was the interest of the minister, if he was conscious he had acted well, to be eager to produce these papers. This war was said to be different from any other in which this country had ever been engaged. Certainly the manner in conducting it would lead us to think so ; and the manner in which information was refused in this war, was very different from what had ever taken place before. This was the only war in which the misconduct of ministers was never to be made the

subject of inquiry. Nay, there was not even an attempt to be made in a British house of commons to inquire into the misconduct of ministers in this war. They claimed an exemption from all inquiry exactly in proportion to their incapacity. The minister said, "I will not grant you papers; move your inquiry." Now his answer was this, he could not tell whether it would be necessary to move for an inquiry until he had seen these papers. But the minister, although he would neither grant an inquiry, nor any information which might lead to it, yet he would grant what he called a *discussion*. Mr. Sheridan said he had come forward with a statement founded, perhaps, upon rumour, and desired information; he therefore moved for such papers as were calculated to afford that information. The minister started up and contradicted every word he said, but refused the information he desired; and then observed, now you have had a full *discussion* of the subject. This was the minister's constant practice; but what integrity was there in it? How could the public be satisfied with such behaviour? what proof had they, unless they took the minister's own word in his own favour for satisfactory proof, that the affairs of government are properly conducted? Last session he brought this subject forward; he was told by the minister he lamented that the lateness of the session prevented him from agreeing to an inquiry; there was nothing he desired so much, for that he was persuaded it would redound to the honour of His Majesty's servants; if, therefore, it should be moved this session, he should be glad to assent to it. How stood the matter now? The motion is made and the minister opposes it. Now he would ask if there was any one man in that house who would stand up and say that there was no reason to apprehend there was any blame whatever imputable to those who have had the conduct of the war, or in the expedition to the West-Indies? Would any man say so, when he recollected what had happened after that brave.

gallant, and admirable officer, Sir Charles Grey, left the West-Indies?—after his brilliant conquests there? He believed there was no man, even among the minister's friends, hardy enough to make that assertion. How had Sir Charles Grey been treated by the King's ministers? From the hour he left England to the hour he returned in 1794, not one man of reinforcement had been sent to him to the Leeward Islands. He believed not a single man. Of this he did not speak with absolute certainty, but he believed not one man had been sent. If he was misinformed upon this subject, it was in the minister's power, and it was the minister's duty, to refute him. Now, if in consequence of this negligence of ministers, we had lost the greatest part of the conquests of Sir Charles Grey; if, from the delay of equipments in 1794, men had been kept in floating pest-houses until they perished by disease; if by a culpable, scandalous, murderous negligence of ministers all this had happened, and he was ready to prove it had, was that, or was it not, matter for the inquiry of that house? Most assuredly it was; but how were these things to be inquired into before the proper documents were on the table of the house?

Here Mr. Sheridan took a general view of what happened with respect to Admiral Christian's squadron, and contended there was much and very culpable neglect on the part of ministers. But instead of allowing an inquiry, they resented the idea of it. 'This was the modern practice of administration. It was illustrated completely in the conduct of the Secretary at War the other day, when the letter of the Count de Sombreuil was called for. He said, we would not consent to lay it before the house, because it was called for under an idea that an injurious opinion had been said to be formed of him (Mr. Windham), in consequence of that letter. Thus the resentment of the right honorable gentleman, and his unwillingness to indulge the house

with any information, had made him forget the whole tenor of the letter. He had said it was entirely a private affair, whereas it contained not one word on any but public affairs. Here Mr. Sheridan condemned, in a very severe manner, the conduct of His Majesty's ministers towards that brave and unfortunate officer, whom, he said, they had totally deluded, else he would not have proceeded on the service in which he was sacrificed. Should the proper information be granted him upon this point, he would pledge himself to make out such a charge against the minister as would justify an impeachment against him. He did not now say he could prove where the whole of the misconduct lay, but there was prodigious misconduct somewhere with respect to this expedition to Quiberon; and the purpose of part of this motion was, to discover the source of that misconduct. Nor was there any thing new in calling for this sort of inquiry. If a captain lost a ship, it was a matter of course to try him by a court-martial, whether he was really to blame or not, and so the case should be with regard to ministers. This was a scandalously planned expedition, and an inquiry ought to be instituted into it. Ministers were not so tender in the case of others as they were with themselves with regard to inquiries. They had caused that gallant officer, Admiral Cornwallis, to be tried by a court-martial for not shifting his flag and proceeding to the West-Indies. There had occurred no disobedience of orders, but a misunderstanding merely. He did not say they were not right in instituting this trial, although the effect of it was a little whimsical. The sentence was curious, for it stated that that able and gallant officer had done both right and wrong. He said that blame was imputable to him, but no censure merited. This he stated to shew the readiness ministers had to accuse others, and consequently it was not very gracious to them to resent the idea of being themselves accused. He should now proceed to state to the

house the motions which he intended to make as mere preliminary matter; for he would, if they were granted, follow them up with solemn accusations against ministers. The motions were to this effect :

That an account be laid before the house of the number of men destined for the expedition to the West Indies, under Sir C. Grey, at the close of the year 1793.

That an account be laid before the house of the number of men withdrawn from that service, in order to form an expedition to the coast of France, under Lord Moira.

An account of the number of men, who, after the conquest of Martinique, St. Lucie, and Gaudaloupe, were detached to St. Domingo, by Sir Charles Grey, in obedience to orders from home.

That the different applications made by the several commanders-in-chief for reinforcements, since the appointment of Sir Ralph Abercrombie, be laid before this house, or such parts of the same as can with safety be communicated.

That returns be laid before the house of the several reinforcements which actually arrived in the West Indies during that period, specifying the distribution of the force, and the dates when they arrived.

That an account be laid before this house of the number of men which have been sent to St. Domingo from the commencement of the war, specifying the places from whence they were sent, and the dates when they arrived.

That the appointment of Sir Ralph Abercrombie to the command in the West Indies be laid before the house.

That the number of regiments ordered, specifying what regiments, on the expedition under Sir Ralph Abercrombie, be laid before the house.

That General Doyle's appointment, and the regi-

ments ordered to serve under him, be laid before the house.

That there be laid before the house extracts of all letters from Admiral Christian and General Abercrombie, from the date of their appointment respecting the delay of the sailing of the expedition.

That there be laid before the house, a return of the number of ships foundered or missing, and the number of men lost or missing belonging to the expedition under General Abercrombie.

That a return be laid before the house of the number of officers and men lost by disease in the West Indies since the arrival of Sir Charles Grey to the end of the last year, specifying the loss sustained in each regiment.

That there be laid before the house an account of the number of men who died on board transports at Plymouth, Portsmouth, Southampton, or in ports of Great Britain or Ireland, destined for the West Indies, in the years 1794 and 1795.

Copies or extracts of letters or memorials on this subject from the officers commanding the troops on board the said transports, from the mayor of Plymouth, or from Lord George Lenox, governor of Plymouth garrison.

Extracts of all letters from Sir Ralph Abercrombie and Admiral Christian, respecting the delays of the expedition under their command.

Copy of His Majesty's letter of service, appointing a particular board for the conduct of the transport service.

Copy of the correspondence between the said board, His Majesty's Secretary at War, and the Board of Ordnance, respecting the West India expedition.

An account of the total expense incurred in the transport service for the West India expedition in the years 1794 and 1795.

An account of all hospital stores sent to the West Indies for His Majesty's service in the years 1794

and 1795, specifying the ships in which they were sent.

A copy of a proclamation issued in the name of His Majesty, in St. Domingo, signed Parker and Forbes, and dated Mole St. Nicholas, December 10.

An account of the number of men serving in England, under the command of the Earl of Moira in the years 1794 and 1795.

An account of the French regiments raised and embodied in England, in the years 1794 and 1795, distinguishing the number of men in each regiment, and stating the services on which they have been employed.

Having read these motions, he proceeded to comment on the circumstances that rendered each of them necessary, in the course of which he took a view of the whole conduct of the West India expedition; the neglect of the equipment; the cruel manner in which the troops were treated; they were allowed to perish for want of care being taken of them at our own ports; the manner in which remonstrances had been made to government by the officer at Portsmouth, and by Lord George Lenox; the inattention of ministers to these remonstrances; the deplorable condition of the troops in the West Indies, in consequence of excessive fatigue, and the want of reinforcement; their want of proper clothing, and particularly their want of shoes, in consequence of which they were known to have moistened the burning sand with blood streaming from their feet while they were on duty; the lamentable mortality among them, some regiments having lost two-thirds of their number for want of medicines; the madness of the expedition to Quiberon and Isle Dieu, whither we had sent scare-crow regiments; had ransacked all the jails in the kingdom for soldiers; and if we had not robbed, we had defrauded the gibbet. Did not the house conceive that some explanation was necessary with respect to the several expeditions planned against the coast of France? Was

the numerous staff, employed under Lord Moira, a circumstance that required no explanation? Why that numerous armament kept idle and unemployed, and suffered to be the theme of so much contempt and ridicule throughout the country, which never could attach on the gallant nobleman who then commanded it, but on the ministers by whom it was planned; for so far from any blame being imputable to the noble Earl, he was confident that he would not be adverse to appear at the bar of that house, to shew that the whole disgrace, inseparable from this expedition, was to be attributed alone to the weak and imbecile conduct of His Majesty's ministers. He would ask, why the troops in the West Indies were so cruelly and shamefully neglected, at a time when so gaudy, expensive, and inactive camps were kept up throughout the country? Nothing, he asserted, but a miracle saved at that period the West Indies, and their salvation was totally owing to the sickness and diseases that prevailed amongst the troops of the enemy. He next adverted to the wretched state of the British army; the 29th regiment, he was well assured, lost four hundred men; and, in June, the hospitals in Martinico were crowded with British officers and British soldiers, who were in want, not only of medicines, but even bandages to dress the wounds they had received in gallantly fighting against the enemy. He next adverted to a fact, which he affirmed was well known to several of the officers,—that ninety men had been re-landed on the beach, covered with wounds, and many without limbs, where, for a night, they were left to the mercy of the elements. When there were such strong grounds for inquiry, how, he asked, could it be resisted? The death of General Vaughan, he asserted, was owing to his chagrin in not finding those reinforcements sent out which he demanded. His next motion was for “An account of the number of men who died in the ports of Plymouth, Southampton, and Portsmouth;” also

for "A copy of a letter sent from the Mayor of Portsmouth and Colonel Lenox." These were for the purpose of informing the house, that day after day many of the troops in those places expired in consequence of being cooped up in the transports. Many dead bodies were thrown overboard, and others were carried indecently through the streets without coffins. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, on a former occasion, held his information cheap, and even presumed to deny the fact; but he had several letters from officers on board the fleet, complaining of the circumstance, who, if the house would grant a committee, he had no doubt, would appear at the bar, and prove the authenticity of his information. He next adverted to the fleet under the command of Admiral Christian; and here he would assert, that ministers were again culpable; for he could not admit it as a justification for the delay of the fleet, that the Transport Board and Board of Ordnance suffered some idle *etiquette* to injure the public service. He could state, on the best authority, that the melancholy disasters which occurred to that fleet were not to be attributed to mere adverse winds, but to the negligence in not sending it out in small detachments, which would have arrived in time to reinforce the army, and yield the necessary succour to the islands. Mr. Sheridan next proceeded to read the following proclamation:—

ST. DOMINGO.

Mole St. Nicholas, Dec. 10.

BY THE KING.

WE, William Parker, Esq. Rear-Admiral of the Red, and Gordon Forbes, Esq. Major-General and Commander in Chief of his Britannic Majesty's Forces by Land and Sea.

His Britannic Majesty, feeling for the distresses of the colony of St. Domingo, has received favourably the submissions of a great number of the inhabitants of every quarter, and granted them his protection.

It was to be believed, that all who had been instructed by the excess and the universality of calamities, would have hastened to unite themselves under his tutelary authority.

Thus His Majesty did not think it proper at first to display that appearance of power which would have announced the conqueror rather than the emancipator. He sent only a small force, which was sufficient to secure the general police, if the effervescence of opinions had been calm, but insufficient for reducing by force the great body of the mistaken inhabitants.

The beneficent views of His Majesty have been partly frustrated, when he concentrated his forces on some particular districts to which he has restored their tranquillity, their worship, and their opulence.

He has abandoned, for a moment and with regret, the remainder of the colonies to the ravages of anarchy.

But His Majesty owes to the glory of his arms to complete by force the work which he undertook from generosity. He owes it to public morals to annihilate a system destructive of all the social bonds which unite the colonies among themselves, and which unite the whole to one sovereign.

He owes to his personal sensibility to hold forth a succouring hand to a multitude of worthy men, who groan in every part of the island, and invoke his protection. He owes to his clemency the pardoning of errors. In fine, he owes to his justice the punishment of those who persist in refusing the paternal and regular government which is offered them, and who, after having made acts of submission, break their oaths by committing acts of rebellion.

His Majesty, by a continuation of naval victories, has so reduced the marine of the French republic, that it is absolutely impossible for the government of that country to send any aid to its partisans in St. Domingo. He has even forced the Convention itself to proclaim, by an express decree, its impotency in that respect.

His Majesty has, therefore, determined to send to St. Domingo such a body of forces, that all resistance shall henceforth be impossible.

In confiding to us the command of his forces by sea and land, His Majesty has commanded us to fulfil exactly the views by which he himself is directed.

We bring then to all the inhabitants of St. Domingo, and to each individual, peace or war, prosperity or destruction.

We promise, in the name of the King, that those who submit willingly, shall find, under the protection of His Majesty, the pardon of their errors, individual safety, and the preservation of their property.

Those who, after a voluntary submission, wish to leave the island, shall be at liberty to embark for the American Continent, or for France, upon taking an oath not to bear arms against His Majesty during the war.

We declare, in the name of the King, that those who shall resist his arms, shall experience all the rigor of the laws of war, and that whoever violates an oath of fidelity, shall be punished with death as a rebel.

Given in the house of the King, at Mole, Dec. 10, 1795.

(Signed)

PARKER and FORBES.

Mr. Sheridan proceeded to state, that if the papers for which he moved were produced, he would prove to the house a most solemn and serious charge of misconduct and mismanagement on the part of ministers. If they feel bold on the occasion, they should feel grateful on the opportunity he gave them of vindicating their characters, and exculpating themselves from those charges with which they stand arraigned. He next adverted to their affected solicitude for peace. He must observe, there was nothing before the house to justify them in saying there was at this time any prospect of peace. He hoped and trusted that some opportunity would arise, in which they should have an answer from the minister, what the prospect of negotiation was. He hoped that we should all know in a regular manner the result of the negotiation lately attempted; for silence upon such a subject was extremely dangerous. The impression that had been already made out of doors was considerable; and, although some persons might think that we are at war now, on account of the arrogant claims and unreasonable pretences of the French, he was convinced the general impression was, that we are at war, not on account of the arrogant claims, intolerable pride, or unreasonable pretences of the French, but because the minister of this country has not made a sincere attempt to negotiate. Such was his opinion; and he thought it fair to speak his conviction upon that subject. But whether the war be now imputable to French or to English counsels, nothing will insure future success so much as an inquiry. Therefore, assuming, for the sake of the argument, what he never would admit, that the French were the aggressors; assuming, what he knew to be false, that the war on our part was just and necessary, and even unavoidable; assuming all these things merely for argument, he would still affirm, there was every reason for that house to enter into the inquiry for which his motions were intended to pave the way; and there-

fore he trusted he should not be opposed upon this subject. He then concluded with his first motion.

Mr. Dundas replied, and concluded with desiring, "That if the honorable gentleman wished for an inquiry, he would give his honorable friend and him time to consider the twenty motions which he had submitted to the house, that they might know which to accede to, and which to reject."

Mr. Sheridan said, that he considered the proposition of the right honorable gentleman for a short delay, in order to consider what papers he should grant as perfectly fair. But he wished to call the attention of the house to the reason why he had so long delayed bringing the subject forward. He certainly at the commencement of the session, when he was said to have menaced ministers on this point, expected that an inquiry would have taken place into the whole conduct of the war. At that time an immense armament was preparing to set out for the West-Indies, and had he then made his motions, it would have been said—"Do you wish to disclose to the enemy the state of the islands; do you wish to make known their wants at the very moment when means are taking to afford them the requisite supply?" Now the campaign was over, and the season for action past, it could not be urged that any danger could arise from disclosure. The whole speech of the right honorable gentleman went to accuse him with delay, and want of candor, in bringing forward his motions. He had not attempted to show that any communication which he demanded, could, in the smallest degree, be injurious to the public. He hoped that when he had considered the motions, he would be prepared, precisely, to state in what respect they could be productive of danger. The right honorable gentleman had contested his assertion with respect to Sir Charles Grey. It now however appeared from his own admission, that Sir Charles Grey had not the use of one single man. What was the argument of the right honorable gentleman? that Sir Charles Grey did not want

reinforcements, else he would not have sent three regiments to St. Domingo, and afterwards dispatched a fourth to the same quarter. Except Sir Charles Grey had dispatched this force from the instructions of ministers, or in the confidence of larger reinforcements being sent out for the security of the Islands, the right honorable gentleman attached to him a heavy responsibility. If he had been so miserably mistaken with respect to the security of the Islands, if he had acted on his own authority and judgement, then undoubtedly he, and not ministers, were responsible. But it having the solemn assurance, and being in the daily expectation of the arrival of a larger force, he took upon himself to dispatch those four regiments, then ministers were accountable why they had neglected to send out that force, which was essential for the security of the Islands. On this subject he should feel it necessary to bring forward an additional motion, "That Sir Charles Grey be directed to attend at the bar of this house."

General Tarleton asked, whether in sending the regiments to St. Domingo, Sir Charles Grey followed his own inclinations or the instructions of ministers?

Mr. Sheridan remarked, that this was a delicate point. He understood that Sir Charles Grey was always of opinion, that the force which he had was insufficient for the security of the Islands. Sir Charles Grey never did, never could make a declaration that those Islands could be retained without an additional force. But was not the inference which the right honorable gentleman obviously meant to draw from his statement—that Sir Charles Grey, on leaving the Islands, was perfectly satisfied with respect to their security, and the adequacy of the force left to protect them? But would Sir Charles Grey, he asked, have acted as he did, except in the conviction that a larger force was to be sent for their protection? He must persist therefore in his motion for the attendance of Sir Charles

Grey, and the only question he should ask him at the bar was,—“ Whether, upon sending away the regiments, and leaving the islands, he thought them in a state of security, except on the supposition of the arrival of additional reinforcements.”

The debate was adjourned to the 28th.

APRIL 22.

DOG TAX BILL.

Mr. Dent moved, that the committee on the dog tax be deferred till Monday, on account of the absence of the minister, when he would propose entering into that stage of the bill, whether he was present or not. He would also take the sense of the house that no difference should be made between assessed and unassessed houses; and also upon the application of the whole produce of the tax to the relief of the poor rates.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he did not know how the bill concerned the Chancellor of the Exchequer at all, except there was some special provision in it against a destructive animal, with “ William Pitt ” upon his collar, which had been found killing sheep. He was not at all surprised at any creature of that right honorable gentleman living upon the public. He seriously advised, however, the Secretary of the Treasury to have another bill prepared; for the clauses of the present were so absurd, that he was confident the bill would be thrown out.

APRIL 25.

DOG TAX BILL.

The order of the day for the commitment of this bill was read. Mr. Dent moved, “ That the Speaker leave the chair.”

Mr. SHERIDAN expected that a motion would have been made to withdraw the bill, and on that account he formerly recommended His Majesty's

ministers to have another ready, for he conceived it would be losing time to attempt to amend it. He had never seen a bill so absurd and objectionable throughout before, and indeed he was not sorry that it was so, for it appeared to him a just punishment for the pride and presumption of those persons, who, because they retain a seat in that house, imagine themselves so many Chancellors of Exchequers, and impatiently step forward to propose new taxes. Instead of being desirous to take the management of finance out of ministers' hands, he thought it would be better for them to leave it where it is; because by leaving ministers in the undisturbed possession of the privilege of imposing taxes, they left them a responsibility for the heavy burdens they laid upon the people, to defray the enormous expences of those wars their indiscreet ambition occasioned, and consequently all the odium. Now in regard to the bill itself, he never met with one more extraordinarily worded; and the folly of it extended even to the title: for, whereas the title should have been "A tax bill," it was entitled, "A bill for the better protection of the persons and property of His Majesty's subjects against the evil arising from the increase of dogs, by subjecting the keeping or having such dogs to a duty." Hence, instead of supposing, as it generally had been supposed, that dogs were better than watchmen for the protection of property, people might be led to imagine that dogs were guilty of all the burglaries usually committed. In the preamble, also, there was the same species of phraseology: for it begins—"Whereas many dangers, accidents, and inconveniences," which, to be sure, was a beautiful climax! "had happened to the cattle, and other property of His Majesty's subjects." Now he had never before heard of any particular accidents happening to property from the hydrophobia, except in the case of cattle. In the *Adventurer*, a periodical paper, published by the ingenious Dr. Hawkesworth, he remembered, in-

deed, a sort of humorous account of a dog that bit a hog in the streets ; the hog bit a farmer, and the farmer bit a cow ; and, what was very extraordinary, each conveyed his peculiar quality to the other : for the hog barked like a dog, the farmer grunted like a hog, and the cow did the best to talk like the farmer. Now, he thought, there must have been something like this disposition in inanimate things also, by the conduct of the honorable gentleman looking so carefully after property ; for, unless an instance had occurred of furniture's behaving in a disorderly manner, or a dumb waiter's barking in consequence of the hydrophobia, he conceived such a phrase could not have been introduced. The next part he had to notice was a clause, the blank of which he hoped would never be filled, that very solemnly stated, " For and in respect of every such dog, and for and in respect of every such bitch," a sum hereafter to be fixed was to be paid, and a register of such payments fixed on the church-door where the parties reside. So that if the bill passed, they ought to pass another to enlarge all the church and chapel doors throughout the kingdom, for what with one tax and another, no modern church or chapel door was capable of containing a register of them all.

There was another clause, which was to enact, that whenever a person did not pay the duty, no action should apply against any person or persons, for destroying, or converting such dog or dogs, bitch or bitches, to their own use, as were not paid for. Now, if this clause was absolutely to remain, and any person did destroy or convert, as the phrase is, another person's dog, he would most probably assume, that it was not paid for ; or otherwise, by what means could it commonly be proved ? So far the bill was repugnant to the principles of humanity ; for it was nothing less than a death-warrant against that valuable race of animals. Besides, he wanted to know what principle the bill proceeded

upon, that the same privilege should not be also allowed with respect to horses, since there was a certain species of dogs, such as pointers, setters, &c. that were scarcely less valuable. According to the same mode of reasoning too, he did not see why there should not be a general scramble for all the hats upon the heads of those gentlemen who did not pay the hat duty ; nor why any person should not convert the powder, another man wore, to his own use, if he suspected that man had not taken out a license. It was true, that after any person had lost his dog in this manner, a clause was provided, whereby he might bring an action, and maintain a right to recover damages from the converter ; but how would it happen, if the dog still fond of his former attachments, should follow his old master ? That master might, in such a case, be whipped as a dog-stealer, though he should afterwards gain an action to prove the prosecutor the thief. He abhorred the bill for its inhumanity, because it was an encouragement to massacre ; and even if the inhumanity of it were entirely out of the question, he should consider it ill timed, in point of policy, inasmuch as it was brought forward at a time when a part of this useful species was co-operating with the combined powers, by maintaining, with unparalleled ferocity, the cause of religion and humanity. In short, it was shewing such ingratitude to our allies, as could never be justified. He came at last to one qualifying clause, which was intended to enact, that puppies, when born, should not be liable to the penalty. But he wished to know at what time they were to be made liable, and by what parish register they were to ascertain the birth of puppies, for he thought there would be some difficulty in getting people to come forward and record precisely every hour what bitch litters. A doctrine had been inculcated, that dogs devour the sustenance of the poor, and therefore we were now to be in the state of a besieged garrison, and feed upon the fare of dogs

and cats. The bill in this instance tended to defeat its own object; for could it be supposed that the poor, at this moment of dearth and scarcity, could afford to divide their scanty meal with such animals? and if they did, what was the conclusion, but that they would rather deprive themselves of some of the necessities of life, than lose their dumb, but faithful companions? Upon the score of humanity, he had still another objection to offer. If the bill passed, there would be so many dogs knocked on the head, that it would tend to harden the minds of the common people, and familiarize them to scenes of cruelty and murder; and the mere sight of so many curs hanging at the doors of the lower orders of the people, already too frequently complained of on account of their brutality to speechless animals, might lead to far more fatal consequences. If the tax were levied only upon hounds and sporting dogs, he should oppose it, because it would only tend to the diminution of the few pleasures which induce gentlemen to spend their fortunes on their own estates. Upon these grounds he wished the bill might not be persisted in.

The question being put, that the Speaker do now leave the chair, it was carried in the negative. Mr. Sheridan then moved, "That this house will, on this day three months, resolve itself into a committee."—Carried.

APRIL 28.

WEST-INDIA EXPEDITION.

Mr. Dundas moved, that the adjourned debate be resumed on the motion, "That there be laid before the house an account of the number of men destined for the West-Indies, to serve under Sir Charles Grey in the year 1793."—The order of the day being read, Mr. Dundas addressed the house, and concluded a long speech, by observing, that he should bring forward some motions relative to the production of papers on the general subject, while he also intended to oppose some of Mr. Sheridan's motions, and amend some others.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that he had never come down to the house with less expectation of hearing

a long speech, or with less intention of making one himself; and he never was more surprised than at the manner in which the right honorable gentleman had chosen to go into the discussion of this subject. As he had wished that every document necessary to afford accurate information should be produced, in order to form the basis of the discussion, he deprecated the idea of the right honorable gentleman reading official papers not regularly before the house, for the authenticity of which the right honorable gentleman would have credit, and which he had brought forward in this way, to make that impression upon the house which might obstruct the effect of any future consideration of the subject, more regularly introduced. The right honorable gentleman had perverted the usual mode of proceeding. He had gone into the papers before they were submitted to the house, made his defence before he was accused, and stated his exculpatory proof before his trial. If he did not, however, say something at present on what the right honorable gentleman had advanced, the impression he meant to make on the house would be fixed. The papers might be produced; but before they were printed, and the discussion fairly brought forward, many delays might intervene, and the right honorable gentleman might refer to the present debate as a full exculpation of his conduct. It had been said, that upon this subject he had spoken in a churlish manner, which, indeed, he did not recollect to have employed, and which certainly was not usual with him. Still, however, he must avow, that with whatever good humor he might be disposed to treat His Majesty's ministers, particularly the right honorable gentleman, that as political characters he wished to have no intercourse with them, but across the table of the house of commons. The honorable gentleman had, indeed, kindly invited him to communications of a more private nature, to pay a visit at the Horse Guards, where he believed, too, a

bottle of excellent wine might be presented ; yet he must decline such intercourse, as it would betray a degree of political coquetry, the suspicion of which he did not wish to incur. He had, it was true, on particular occasions, that of Muir and Palmer, and another young gentleman, waited privately upon the right honorable gentleman in his official capacity, and he would confess, that if he were to be upon such terms with His Majesty's Ministers the right honorable gentleman would be the person with whom he would be desirous to communicate, in his former speech, he had declared that he had no private communication on the subject of West India affairs with that gallant commander, of whom the right honorable gentleman had spoken so highly ; and if the circumstances of his political connection might be supposed to have afforded him opportunities of conversation upon these subjects ; he would say again, that upon such occasions he had carefully abstained from entering upon it, and he believed that person would have known his duty better than to have divulged any part of the expedition in which he had been officially engaged. As to the instructions of that officer, he had only reasoned hypothetically, not from precise information. He thought he had some right to complain of the right honorable gentleman, for the manner in which he came forward with this information. The honorable gentleman had, in the whole course of his argument, assumed that the papers, for which he intended to move, would be granted ; and certainly he had a right to suppose that any motion, coming from that side of the house, was more likely to be carried, than a motion from another quarter. He would not be at all surprised, however, that after his papers were moved for, the production of them should be opposed by influence even more powerful in that house, than the right honorable gentleman's, and that an honorable friend of his would come forward, acknowledging it was

a truly noble display of personal ingenuousness, but it would be incompatible with the interests of the public service to communicate so much information to the house. Though the right honorable gentleman, (said Mr. Sheridan) may have been a rash suggester, he may have a discreet friend near him; nor was it the first time he had known the openness of one minister corrected by the discretion of another. From the whole of this speech, however, instead of being satisfied with his defence, he had only been a thousand times more confirmed in his opinion, that the deepest degree of criminality attached to His Majesty's ministers on account of the manner in which they had conducted the war in the West Indies. After a speech of four hours and a half, the right honorable gentleman had removed no foundation on which he had wished to institute an inquiry. The right honorable gentleman himself confessed, that though he now, from better information, acquitted the various official boards of any blame, he had originally felt considerable indignation at their conduct; how then could he be surprised that others should feel as he had done, or discover blame where he himself had thought censure was merited?—The question, however, now was, whether the right honorable gentleman had succeeded in removing the dissatisfaction which it was natural should arise on account of the delay in sending reinforcements to the West Indies? It was said that the small establishment of this country at the beginning of the war, had limited the exertions of government. This was a language he never heard without alarm. If our former peace establishment was described as miserable, reduced and contemptible, what idea did it lead us to form of a future peace establishment? To this deplorable state, in which ministers had found themselves at the beginning of a war with France, particularly in the West Indies, they ascribed the disasters which arose in its course. Sir Charles Grey was

to have had 10,000, but set out with only 6,000 troops; and from this force, only limited exertions were to be expected, and as the right honorable gentleman admitted, in the finest language of panegyric, the greatness of the merit of Sir Charles Grey, whose success so far exceeded the most sanguine expectations which could be formed.—Never had he heard the right honorable gentleman celebrate the gallantry and merit of a character with greater warmth; but, from the fineness of the words, he suspected they were borrowed from his right honorable friend near him, (Mr. Pitt.) It was wonderful, while he was thus so loudly celebrated in words, that this gallant and meritorious officer was the only person who had not, by the advice of ministers, received some signal mark of royal favor. He only got fine words, instead of being rewarded with substantial marks of the bounty of the sovereign. Still, however, he was not without his reward; for he possessed the satisfaction of conscious worth, the admiration of his brethren in arms, and the approbation of his grateful country. While he saw their panegyric thus confined to barren words, he could lay less stress on their approbation. When the troops destined for the West Indies, were dispatched under the Earl of Moira, the right honorable gentleman discovers that the state of the country required this sacrifice, and demanded the preference of an important to a less important service. This was not the language held at the time this detachment was made.—Then it was contended, he well remembered, that this detachment would not cripple the exertions in the Leeward Islands; but, perhaps, from the perusal of official papers, the right honorable gentleman's memory was now refreshed. It was said, only a regiment or two had been promised, and, beyond this, Sir Charles Grey had no reason to expect reinforcements; but ministers were not to be acquitted upon this miserable quibble. The quantity

of reinforcement was to be measured, not by what Sir Charles Grey had thought necessary in the commencement of his career. When new conquests were achieved, the very nature of things dictated the necessity of reinforcements to maintain them. Sir Charles did not humbly solicit new reinforcements; the brilliancy and the extensiveness of his acquisitions demanded them, in a language which could not be misunderstood; and it was the duty of ministers to have provided for what they could not fail to observe would be required. The honorable gentleman had said, that he (Mr. Sheridan) had criminated Sir Charles Grey, by affirming that the detachment of troops to Jamaica and Barbadoes was improper, and that it was hazarding the safety of the Leeward Islands. But, as his honorable friend (Mr. Grey) had well explained, the conduct of Sir Charles Grey, on that occasion, was influenced by the expectation that reinforcements sufficient for the protection of the Leeward Islands would quickly arrive, and that the French force in the West Indies would gain no accession by reinforcement from Europe.—Without this well-grounded confidence, the conduct of Sir Charles Grey, in making such a detachment, would have been deserving of blame. If the attack in Guadaloupe had been made by troops in the West Indies, when the commander pronounced the islands in a state of safety, then the fault might have been imputed to him; but, if the contrary was the case, the argument of the honorable gentleman was a mere quibble, and the whole guilt devolved upon His Majesty's ministers. But although the sailing of the French fleet were admitted to be an event which could not be prevented, yet the disasters in the West Indies were imputable to ministers in another point of view. In August, 1794, the news arrived of the disaster which befel Guadaloupe, accompanied with an urgent requisition for 6,000 men. How this disaster was occa-

sioned, he did not condescend to inquire. But if he would permit an inquiry to be instituted, it would be found that it was owing to a want of troops, and to a want of necessaries for the troops which were there. Not only did not the reinforcements arrive, but the troops were destitute of cloathing, and were overwhelmed with the fatigues they had encountered.

The state of England again was urged as a reason why reinforcements were not sent; and one fault was defended by the avowal of another. There were only 17,000 troops in the kingdom, and of these 3,000 were destined for the marine service; but, he would ask, how came the marine service to have been previously neglected? This was merely shifting the vulnerable part. Out of these, however, 9,000 were ordered for the West Indies—What hindered their sailing?—It blew a contrary wind, and the French fleet, it was said, jumped out of Brest as soon as our grand fleet put into port to refit. But why were they not sent out in detachments, as had been advised by Sir C. Grey? Or was it to be sustained as an excuse for the delay, that we had not a fleet which could meet the French fleet at sea. As well might it be said, that if the French should be so mean to take such an advantage against a gallant enemy, as to land an army on the coast of Ireland when our fleet was in port, that no blame would be imputable to the executive government. As to the accommodation on board the transports, he would give the right honorable gentleman credit for his humanity, and his concern for the health of the troops; and if there was any neglect in this department, he did not believe that it was personally imputable to him; but he insisted, that the effect was as he had represented, and that every day immense numbers were thrown overboard, who died of sickness and disease, occasioned by neglect, and the want of proper arrangements for preserving the health of the men while on board the transports.

And if this was the case, surely blame was imputable to some person. On whom this blame attached would be found on inquiry. In spring, 1795, the islands were in imminent danger; requisitions were made for reinforcements, and it was resolved to make greater exertions, but the means could not be found. There was only 31,000 regular troops in England. The French had taken Holland, and in such a situation it would not have been safe for the country to have sent a large force on foreign service. Here he could not but remark a strange contradiction in their argument. Some time ago, when the militia and fencible corps were greatly increased, it was represented, this force would be sufficient for the internal defence of the country, and that it would enable us to apply our regular army to foreign service. Both propositions, however, could not be true. Either part of these 31,000 troops might have been spared for the West Indies, or the militia and fencible regiments were insufficient for the purpose for which they were raised. Even in this emergency, an expedition was sent to the Cape of Good Hope, the blame of which the right honorable gentleman, with a sort of monopolizing magnanimity, was pleased to challenge to himself. We have got, said he, the key to the East Indies, and please God, we shall keep it. This was certainly comfortable news to the Stadtholder; but, said the right honorable gentleman, the Stadtholder was not strong enough to hold it, but please God we shall take care of it for him. This, in his opinion, amounted to a declaration, that ministers never wish to see what was called the regular government of Holland re-established, and that they are quite pleased with the system of republican anarchy, which at present prevails in that country. A scheme was at last formed of sending 27,000 men out to the West Indies. But the difficulty was, how they were to be got. Here the right honorable gentleman had adopted the most disgraceful mode of defence that

had ever been attempted before a British house of commons. He said there was a mighty army upon paper ; but when it came to be reviewed, it was found to be good for nothing. When members came forward to parliament, with an account of the army expenses, they represented it as a more splendid establishment than even Louis XIV. could ever boast. But when a requisition was made to furnish men for actual service, it was found to be composed of trash unfit to be trusted on any expedition. Raised, as they had been, upon a system of corrupt jobbing, they consisted of children and enfeebled old men, with a parcel of boys at their head. The remedial operation, which was adopted, was to bring forward the Duke of York, as the retriever of the British army, and the restorer of its discipline. The honorable gentleman was also profusely, and very justly, liberal of his encomiums upon his Royal Highness ; nor was he very abstemious in his claims of merit for himself. Before his plan could be put in execution, an immense number of tremendous difficulties were to be conquered. The regiments were to be reduced, and marched from one end of the kingdom to the other, in order to be drafted, and a rendezvous was to be held at Southampton, for a general review previous to their embarkation. The ordnance service could not be provided, on account of their limited scale of operations admitted by the foundry at Woolwich. Transports could not be provided, on account of our increased and increasing trade, and double winds (a curious phrase) were requisite to convey the ordnance stores from Woolwich to Spithead. In fine, the expedition had always difficulties to encounter, and, unfortunately, the difficulties always got the better of it, and incredible disgraces had always been the fruit of incredible exertions. What, he asked, would have been said in the days of the late Earl of Chatham, if he had adduced such apologies for the failure of an expedition ? And he reminded the right ho-

norable gentleman, that incapacity, as well as neglect, was criminal in those who obtruded themselves into high situations for which they were not fit. Not a week before the 10th of November, Admiral Jervis sailed with a wind which would have carried the whole expedition to the West Indies. But it seems it could not be got ready till the 27th of November, the consequence of which was, all those accumulated disasters, which ruined the fleet, and defeated the enterprize. If ministers were permitted to proceed upon such principles of blundering incapacity, they might give up the contest with France altogether. The expeditions of the French are conducted in a very different manner. None of their plans were frustrated by the want of ordnance, of transports, or of double winds. Every measure was executed with vigor, promptitude, and decision. Rather than have been disappointed in a great design, by the tedious process of ordnance preparations, or the delays of feeble minds, the late Earl of Chatham would have wheeled the ordnance from Woolwich to the most distant point of the island. But the weakness of ministers was uniformly mischievous and contemptible. If the papers he required were granted, he pledged himself to move an inquiry into the conduct of the war in the West-Indies; and, if successful in that object, to follow it up at least with a resolution of the strongest censure.

Mr. Sheridan's motion was put and carried.—He then moved, "That an account be laid before the house, of the number of men withdrawn from that service, in order to form an expedition to the coast of France, under Lord Moira; which, after an amendment confining it to certain dates and specifications, was agreed to.—The next motion, An account of the number of men, who, after the conquest of Martinique, St. Lucie, and Guadaloupe, were detached to St. Domingo, by Sir Charles Grey, in obedience to orders from home, was put and carried.—The fourth motion, That the different applications made by the several commanders-in-chief for reinforcements, since the appointment of Sir R. Abercrombie, be laid before this house, or such other parts of the same as can with safety be communicated, was withdrawn, on the undertaking of Mr. Dundas

to give all the information in his power upon that head.—The fifth, That returns be laid before the house of the several reinforcements which actually arrived in the West-Indies during that period, specifying the distribution of the force, and the dates when they arrived, being amended, by confining it to dates, &c. was agreed to.

Mr. Sheridan then moved for an account of the appointment of Sir John Borlase Warren to the expedition to Quiberon, and also that of General Doyle, together with an account of the regiments serving under him. Mr. Sheridan observed that the right honorable gentleman, in the course of his speech to-night, never made an allusion to the expedition to Quiberon; he was very wise to avoid it. He (Mr. Sheridan) also omitted that expedition in his speech, which in him was a foolish omission. This expedition certainly to a great degree impeded the West India expedition, and some account of it was therefore proper to be laid before the house, when the West-India expedition was to be discussed.

Mr. Pitt objected to this motion; and after some observations by Mr. Sheridan, it was put and negatived.

Mr. Sheridan then moved,

That there be laid before the house extracts of all letters from Admiral Christian and General Abercrombie, from the date of their appointment, respecting the delay of the sailing of the expedition. This was also put and negatived.

Mr. Sheridan then moved,

That there be laid before the house a return of the number of ships foundered or missing, and the number of men lost or missing, belonging to the expedition under General Abercrombie.

Mr. Dundas said, that the ships missing were four in number, but it was impossible to know how many, or whether any of them were foundered, or whether they were captured. If the honorable gentleman wished to have the names of the ships which did not arrive at Barbadoes, a list of these might be made out, but other information could not be given to him. The question was then put and negatived.

Mr. Sheridan wished to know whether the right honorable gentleman meant to state, that the expedition to Quiberon composed part of the expedition to the West-Indies; whether the force should be sent to the West-Indies in the aggregate, as minis-

ters contended, or as he contended, should have been sent in detachments? Was Lord Moira to go to the West-Indies? He should, in order to explain this, move,

That there be laid before the house a return of the general and staff officers belonging to the regiments in England, serving under Lord Moira, in the years 1794 and 1795.

Mr. Dundas promised to give the substance of this information in another form. The motion was withdrawn.

Mr. Sheridan then moved,

That there be laid before the house a copy of the instructions given to Sir John Borlase Warren, relative to the expedition to Quiberon in June and July, 1795.

Mr. Pitt opposed it on the general ground which he had stated already, that the expedition to Quiberon had no connexion with that to the West Indies, and that they should be considered in separate discussions.

Mr. Sheridan maintained that they were connected, for that the troops which were sent to Quiberon and Isle Dien, ought to have been sent to the West-Indies, and the blame rested with ministers that these troops were not sent to the West-Indies.

Mr. Sheridan then moved,

That there be laid before the house an account of the number of men who died on board transports, at Plymouth, Portsmouth, Southampton, or in ports of Great Britain or Ireland, destined for the West Indies, in the years 1794 and 1795.

Mr. Pitt opposed this motion. The account could not be given accurately; besides, if it could, it would only afford a melancholy picture, the examination of which could produce no good.

General Smith thought this answer a very extraordinary one, and supported the motion.

Mr. Fox enforced the propriety of ministers assigning better reasons for refusing information to the house than they had done in the discussion of this business. The motion was put and negatived.

Mr. Sheridan next moved for

Copies or extracts of letters or memorials on this subject from the officers commanding the troops on board the said transports, from the Mayor of Plymouth, or from Lord George Lenox, Governor of Plymouth garrison. The motion was then put and negatived.

The remainder of Mr. Sheridan's motions were all agreed to, excepting that for laying before the house the correspondence of the Ordnance and Transport Board, which, after a conversation, in which Mr. Grey, Mr. Sheridan, the Secretary at War, Mr. Fox, General Smith, and Mr. M. Robinson took a part, was negatived.

Mr. Dundas then moved for a long list of letters, of different dates, 1794, and 1795, from Sir Charles Grey, Sir John Jarvis, General Williamson, and other naval and military commanders in the West-Indies. Ordered.

APRIL 29.

BILL FOR ABOLISHING EXISTING GAME-LAWS.

Mr. Curwen moved the second reading. Captain Berkeley moved that it be read a second time this day three months.

Mr. SHERIDAN agreed with his honorable friend. He was always an enemy to the existing game-laws, because he was an enemy to injustice and oppression. He thought it an odd idea of the right of property, to say property was the creature of the law ; but if it was so, the law ought to follow up its own principle, and protect it. Was it criminal for a man to destroy the animals which destroyed his property ? Yet that was the principle of the existing law. Persons have been transported for invading that property, which it was lawful for animals to destroy, that they might afford sport to a few qualified people ; and in this manner has property for a long time been the sport of law. If every man was permitted to share in the amusement on his own estate, he would be desirous to preserve the game upon it for the sake of that amusement, and not be anxious to annihilate it, as he does now, from a just indignation. And he was apprehensive, that if game were saleable also, instead of having the country paled round with gibbets, as it now is, it would contribute greatly to reduce the penal code ; for, by the act of Geo. I. many persons had suffered imprisonment for life, for partaking of that pleasure which the law decreed exclusively to others ; but which no principle of right, humanity, or justice could defend. Though he saw no chance that the bill would ultimately be successful, yet he wished exceedingly that it might be committed, and

the objectionable parts more particularly pointed at. At all events, he hoped that the act of Geo. I. might be repealed, for nothing could more disgrace our laws.

The house divided; on Captain Berkeley's motion, ayes 65; noes 17: majority against the bill 48.

MAY 9.

SUPPLY.—FOREIGN CORPS.

*Upon the resolution being moved for granting the sum of 438,035*l.* for defraying the expense of foreign corps, raised for the service of Great Britain,*

MR. SHERIDAN said he should object, in the most positive terms, to this country's continuing to employ a set of men, who, it was apparent, were men that could not in any manner, or in any place, be depended on, and whom it was impossible, without betraying the interests of this country, to send either on an expedition to the West-Indies, or any other place where the troops might be necessary. He did not perfectly understand what might be the destination of the troops that were the objects of this expense, nor how many regiments of them at present existed; neither did he know where they were at present; but this he knew, that the employment of emigrants against their countrymen, had been attended with fatal consequences to this country, and had been productive only of that expense and disgrace which he was well assured the continuance of such an absurd system would but tend to increase and aggravate.

The Secretary at War answered.

MR. SHERIDAN replied to what had fallen from the right honorable Secretary at War, concerning the failure of the Quiberon expedition, being classed among the unforeseen calamities of civil war. If ministers will employ men who are unworthy of

trust and confidence, who have proved themselves so on every occasion where they have been trusted, what can be expected but defeat, ruin, and disgrace? As to the Quiberon affair, he had always thought it, and should ever think it, one of the worst planned, most inhumanly mismanaged expeditions, that ever disgraced the annals of this or any other country.

The resolution was agreed to.

REAL SUCCESSION TAX BILL.

Mr. Pitt moved, that the order of the day for the further consideration of the report of this bill should be read, and the report now taken into consideration. Mr. Crewe objected to the tax, and moved, that the report be taken into consideration this day three months.

Mr. Sheridan said, he could not give a silent vote on the question. He would not follow the learned gentleman (the Attorney-General) through the long detail of the difference between the English and Scotch laws. What had fallen from the gentlemen on both sides of the house, many of whom could not possibly be actuated by party motives, would, he trusted, induce the right honorable gentleman to grant the delay, which he perceived in a certain degree was wrung from him, in consequence of the arguments which he had heard this night. The Attorney-General had made some general observations on taxes, and asserted, that in his mind, the present tax was less exceptionable than any he remembered to have been lately imposed. But the present, Mr. Sheridan was convinced, was the most execrable measure of finance that ever came before parliament; and if he excepted the legacy bill, it was merely because it had been sanctioned by an act of the legislature. He had no scruple to say, that both with respect to the Scotch and English laws, the present bill was utterly impracticable; and if time were allowed, even till Thursday, any gentleman who examined it with a keen eye, would see that it abounded with the grossest errors and inconsisten-

cies. He was against any tax that shifted the burden to posterity ; for he thought that those who submitted to measures which necessarily produced taxation, should themselves feel the burden, as it might operate to prevent them from supporting the present irrational system of warfare. He had used this language on a former occasion, and he would use it again, though it might be perverted as heretofore without doors by those who made him say, that he wished that the people were heavily burthened with taxes. The present measure was defended on the grounds, that it was a tax to support a war calculated to put a stop to the progress of Jacobin principles, and to prevent the poor from robbing the rich. Was the measure desirable on the grounds, that His Majesty's ministers were justifiable in robbing the rich in preference to the poor? Such an argument reminded him of the shepherd in the farce, who said he had a mode of curing the sheep of the rot ; but when asked how ? he replied, by *cutting their throats*.

The house divided. For the consideration of the report now 81 ; against it 52.

MAY 10.

WINE DUTY.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that notwithstanding the notice he had given of his intention to move for a clause to render the stock of wine in the hands of private gentlemen equally liable to the new duty as that in the hands of dealers, he should decline making any motion to that effect. It would certainly be unjust to introduce excise officers into the cellars of private gentlemen, although not more so than to tax the stock at present in the hands of dealers. It was far from his wish to have the excise extended to private families, as well from his dislike of the system, as it might have a tendency to make servants

spies on the proceedings of their masters. He could wish that the new duty on wines should be confined to future importations, and not made to include the stock at present on hand; and he must caution the minister against laying too heavy a duty on the article, as such a step would, in all likelihood, in the course of a very short time, operate as a prohibition. Although it might appear that the consumption of wine, during the last year, was greater than in other preceding ones, yet he should recollect the old proverb, "that an additional hair may break the camel's back." His intention was to move a clause to the bill, by way of rider, providing, that the wines imported in consequence of the recent orders sent abroad, which may arrive by the first of July next, should be liable to the new duties payable by instalments, in the same manner as the duties upon stock in hand.

Mr. Pitt in reply observed, if Mr. Sheridan had a rider to the effect mentioned ready to be added to the bill, he should have no objection to adopt the proposition.

Mr. Sheridan said, he considered it due from him to apologize to the house for not being prepared with a rider, pursuant to his intention; but he was completely taken by surprise by the right honorable gentleman, as he felt nothing more astonishing than that he should adopt any proposition submitted by him to the house.

MAY 13.

REAL AND PERSONAL SUCCESSION TAX BILL.

Mr. Pitt moved the order of the day for the third reading of the bill for granting to His Majesty a tax on the real succession of landed estates. The order being read, he moved, that the bill be read a third time this day three months, which was agreed to.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he hoped the right honorable gentleman had now considered the personal succession tax, and was prepared to give it up; but

it was too much to expect that he would give up two so great fortresses of revenue in one night. If the honorable gentleman derived any credit by abandoning the real succession tax, he should make it complete, by renouncing the personal succession tax, which was equally exceptionable in its principle, and more dangerous in its operation. He was astonished that this bill had raised so little the attention, and excited so little the opposition of the commercial world. It had been said that the landed gentlemen were like a sheep, which allowed itself to be shorn without complaint, while the monied gentlemen were like a hog, that squeaked when a single bristle was plucked. Here, however, the observation had been completely belied. Indeed, some address seemed to have been displayed in dividing the two bills, though the same in principle, and thus, by dividing the interest, contriving likewise to divide the opposition. Upon the ground that the honorable gentleman had stated for withdrawing the real succession tax, it was not entirely abandoned, but was only set asleep, and might be revived when the grounds were removed. The reason was stated to be, that the landed interest was already more severely taxed in proportion than the mercantile interest. He had formerly stated, and he now repeated, that though this were the last campaign of the war, the first measure that the right honorable gentleman would be forced to take would be to lay on permanent taxes to the amount of three millions, and to raise the peace revenue to 23 millions. This was his fixed opinion; and he had no objection to have his words taken down, should it on any future discussion be found convenient to recur to them. In laying on taxes to this amount, it would soon happen that commercial property would be sufficiently taxed, and landed property would have no ground of exemption upon the score of inequality, and the reasons stated for giving up the real

succession tax, would cease to operate. Mr. Sheridan then stated, that the principles of the two bills was the same, but the one already passed was much more dangerous. The different effects of these two bills, he considered as preposterous; if a man dies worth 50,000*l.* and leaves landed estates to that amount to his heir, government by one bill receives no benefit: but if such a personal property be left, by virtue of the other bill, it is authorised to seize upon part of the produce. If a merchant dies, a certain duty is to be paid to government, on the calculation of all his commercial concerns, speculations, and debts, and a balance struck upon the whole, before a division of his property could be made; a period of five or six years frequently took place before his affairs could be settled, and in the mean time, the executor would be debarred from paying off the amount of the legacies till the quantum of the government demand by this tax was ascertained; and to whom, Mr. Sheridan asked, was all this to be submitted? To certain subordinate officers appointed by the commissioners of the stamp duties throughout every county in Great Britain; he supposed there must be 20,000 such officers to carry this into effect. Mr. Sheridan here stated a case, that a man leaves an extensive trade to his son, reserving one-tenth part of it to a natural son; he apprehended that by this act the officer would be bound to know that the executor really pays the tenth part of the profit of the trade; and how, he asked, was it possible for him to know this without an inspection of his books and affairs? An evil would unavoidably grow out of this, not only of publishing to the world what the deceased might wish to have concealed, but also it would go to the extent of appointing, not Wards of Chancery, but of the Treasury, on behalf of such son. Let the right honorable gentleman, he added, farther consider the delicacy of a man's credit engaged in large commercial concerns: many of the largest capital and

credit might be subject to temporary embarrassments. If commercial men would turn this matter maturely over in their minds, Mr. Sheridan said they would be convinced that it would prove such a blow to commerce, as would prevent it from ever flourishing in this country. He stated another objection—that by taxing a man's trade, manufacture, and industry, it held out an inducement to him to retire from business, and live upon his estate, by which means he would be exempted from the tax, thus imposing a penalty upon industry, and holding out a bounty to indolence. He shewed that this bill, which professed to be taken from a law in Holland, was of a more oppressive nature, for in that country a man's concerns in trade were not affected by the operation of the law. Mr. Sheridan wished that the right honorable gentleman might have time to reconsider the bill, and to consult commercial men on the subject—and said he would leave the result to the discretion of the Lords of the Treasury. He adverted to the difficulty which might occur, as to supplying the amount of this tax, which was calculated at 100,000*l.*; and hinted, that if the King of Sardinia's subsidy of 200,000*l.* was to be withheld from him under present circumstances, that the Chancellor of the Exchequer could be at no loss for a remedy, and might even think himself obliged to the French for having so opportunely tossed that sum into his hands. He hoped, that at any rate the Chancellor of the Exchequer would attempt the repeal of it in the next session of parliament. He concluded with moving, "That leave be given to bring in a bill to authorise the commissioners of the stamp office to postpone carrying into effect the act passed this session of parliament, imposing a duty upon personal property, if ordered so to do under the hands of the Lords of the Treasury."

OCTOBER 18.

INVASION.—AUGMENTATION OF THE FORCES.

The order of the day being read, and the house having resolved itself into a committee to consider the clause of His Majesty's speech respecting an invasion—that paragraph of the speech was read as follows:

“ You will feel this peculiarly necessary at a moment when the enemy has openly manifested the intention of attempting a descent on these kingdoms. It cannot be doubted what would be the issue of such an enterprize ; but it befits your wisdom to neglect no precautions that may either preclude the attempt, or secure the speediest means of turning it to the confusion and ruin of the enemy.”

Mr. Pitt concluded a long speech by moving, “ That leave be given to bring in a bill to raise a certain number of men in the several counties of England, and from the different shires, stewarties, towns, and boroughs of Scotland, for the service of His Majesty's army and navy.”

MR. SHERIDAN.—In two points I am happy to agree with the right honorable gentleman, namely, that it will be a fitter opportunity for discussing the merits of the plan which he has suggested to the committee after the bills are introduced, and that the scheme of preparation, which he has now opened, is nothing more than following up the vote of the house on the first day of the session. I must confess, however, I expected that the right honorable gentleman would have accompanied his statement of defensive operations with some explanation of the reasons why it is necessary to take any such measures at all. The plan which he has in view, if put in execution, will certainly impose additional burdens upon the people, and considerably subtract from the industry of the nation, in which its greatest riches consist. And before proposing a plan which inevitably has this tendency, it certainly is no unreasonable expectation that its necessity should have been evinced. I am aware that it would be improper to demand much precision of explanation upon the subject, but because it would not have been consistent with his duty to give a particular disclosure of circumstances, surely that was no reason why he should have left the necessity of the formidable arrange-

ments which he has proposed upon the vague and indefinite basis on which they at present rest. And if this house of commons is not disposed to follow the example of the last parliament, to sacrifice the rights of the people to the regal prerogative, and to surrender with the blindness of implicit confidence the direction of public affairs to the ministers of the crown, I trust that as there are more new members in this than in any former parliament (a circumstance which of itself is certainly pleasing intelligence to the public), they at least will think it a duty they owe to their constituents to demand some farther satisfaction upon the subject, before they give an unqualified assent to a project so new and unprecedented. There is something extremely peculiar in the mode of announcing the attempt in His Majesty's speech, which I certainly have a right to consider as the speech of the Minister. The words "manifested the intention," are vague and indefinite, and I could wish that by some more express communication, they would attach to themselves a greater share of responsibility for the measures in contemplation, than can result from the cautious terms in which His Majesty's speech is couched.

I wish to be informed whether they knew any thing of what is passing in France, or whether any preparations have been making for such an attempt? I am sure if they are entirely ignorant of this, the secret-service money voted by parliament must have been grossly misapplied. If they have taken the alarm merely from the blustering speeches of French generals, or some threatening rhodomontade which has passed in their councils, it has certainly been most groundlessly conceived. Were an invasion to be attempted by the enemy, there is no man more sanguine than I am, in thinking that the issue of such an attempt would be highly honorable to the patriotism and the courage of the inhabitants of this country. Any doubt that it would have a contrary issue is, in my opinion, worthy of being treated only

with contempt ; and if the government of France can be at all influenced by the idea of receiving assistance from the people of England, they are unfit to conduct the affairs of a great nation. Such pitiful succour as they would find in this island, if there are any individuals of character so depraved, and feelings so degenerate, as to join their standard, would, I am sure, rather impede than forward their progress. I cannot boast of possessing that military ardour, that chivalry of patriotism which I have heard has been displayed at some meetings in the City, where a wish has been expressed, that 3 or 400,000 Frenchmen might land here, merely to give them an opportunity of exercising their prowess in slaughtering them ; but I have no doubt that ruin and confusion will be the fate of those who may be hardy enough to undertake such an enterprize. I agree with the right honorable gentleman in all his statements of the necessity and propriety of adopting measures of prevention and defence, if the enemy's intention be such as to warrant them. I give this qualified assent to the measures which he proposes to adopt, because I profess to have no confidence whatever in the Minister. Those who implicitly confide in his judgment and sincerity, will be disposed to give him credit for the necessity of the steps which he is about to take. Those who, with me, were witnesses of their conduct during last parliament, have so often seen the present ministers raising alarms in the country when no danger existed, merely to enlarge their own power, and to frighten the people into a hasty concurrence with their unprincipled schemes of aggrandizement, that it cannot be surprizing to them if I suspect their integrity on the present occasion. I do not ask precise information from them respecting the state of France, but I wish to know, whether they are advised that there are ships collected at the different ports of the French coast, apparently for no other purpose than that of being employed as instrumental

in invading this country? If their alarm is taken up on no other foundation than the empty rhodomontade of speeches, all preparation to resist an attempt, which only exists in the distempered brain of a feverish orator, is absurd and ridiculous. The idea of invasion is by no means new. We have heard in this country of a project of invading France, and the march of our army to Paris was to consummate the triumphs of the first campaign of the war. This was not lightly talked of, it was gravely stated in the gravest of all assemblies, a British house of commons, by no obscure person, but by gentlemen of great weight, and very nearly connected with the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt), and at the time was much applauded by a great majority of the house. One of the gentlemen who proposed this daring line of operation, in the enthusiasm of the idea, entered the army, got the command of a regiment, and thus manifested the sincerity of his intentions. But we never heard that the government of France had taken any steps to repel the threatened danger. I will not disguise my opinion that this note of preparation is founded for a purpose very different from that which has been this day professed. We have heard that the French armies have been completely defeated, and even annihilated in Germany; and except, like the frogs in the marsh, who were afraid of being attacked by the conquered bull, ministers suppose that the French, after being routed by the Emperor, are to come over and attack us, it is difficult to reconcile their present alarm with their other representations.— But supposing that the French really intend to make an invasion upon this country, which is the natural inference that they will draw from the resolutions which have been opened, and one of which has been proposed for the approbation of the committee? Do we not allow that the country is not at present prepared to repel any attack that may be made against it? In the last parliament, a right honorable gen-

tleman (Mr. Secretary Dundas) triumphantly announced, and at the time expressed his desire that all Europe might hear it, but lest even the stentorian vigor of his lungs should have not carried the welcome intelligence to the ears of all the new members who now sit in the house, I shall re-state it—“That with the naval and military force which the nation could then command, we had nothing to dread from the united efforts of the combined powers of Europe. Such was the unexampled strength of our navy, and such the courage and loyalty of our regular troops, aided by the zeal and intrepidity of a vast establishment of fencible and volunteer corps, that there was no possible danger to which we could be exposed, whether from our foreign or domestic enemies, that we might not encounter with the most confident assurance of success.” If the martial ardor then testified by volunteer associations, was not a mere spurt of loyalty, and if the persons who composed these corps had enrolled themselves not from motives of interest or from vanity, but from patriotism and devotion to their country, why repose so little confidence in their exertions, or distrust their fidelity to a cause to which they are pledged by their honor as well as by their interest? I am afraid that the resolutions now proposed, are calculated rather to invite than to prevent an invasion—that they tend to frighten this country, but not to frighten France. They proclaim to the enemy that till the new force which it is proposed to collect and to train is brought into action, that we are not in a proper state of defence, and thus point out the immediate time as the proper period for making a successful attempt. But I am persuaded, as I have already said, that the plan now in agitation points to a very different object from that which is professed; that it is in the contemplation of His Majesty’s ministers to prolong the shocking and inhuman species of warfare, with a view of extending our possessions in the West Indies, and that it is for this purpose

that parliament are called upon to sanction those measures which it is pretended are dictated by the imperious necessity of the times and indispensably required for the safety and security of the country. I do not find myself called upon to oppose the resolutions; on the contrary, if they are necessary, let them be adopted by all means.—I wish only to have some farther explanation, and to be informed whether the danger of an invasion is such as to require these measures of prevention, or whether the real object of all the preparations is not the extension of our colonial possessions in the West Indies? Some of the expedients suggested by the right honorable gentleman, it was impossible to hear without a smile. We are called upon to raise a great cavalry force for a very curious reason, because the enemy cannot easily import cavalry into the country; as well, supposing them to attack us only with cavalry, might it be said, that we ought only to have infantry to oppose to them. I have no objection to club for a horse, or to exercise in Hyde Park, and I dare say the right honorable gentlemen are very well acquainted with the maxim of ride and die. I must confess, however, I cannot easily perceive the propriety of enlisting a corps of game-keepers, as if a game-keeper only had the heart to be a soldier. Besides, this class of men are by no means the most dexterous in the use of fire-arms. The squires with more propriety ought to be selected. I am sure I know many gentlemen who are infinitely more expert shooters than their game-keepers. Neither am I fond of the posthumous *ex post facto* reflection which is thrown upon the depute game-keepers.—But without at all entering into the detail of the intended operations, if the right honorable gentleman is really in possession of grounds of serious alarm, and if the present force of the country is insufficient to avert, or to repel the danger, in the choice of difficulties I shall give my assent to the resolutions.

The resolution was put and carried.

NOVEMBER 1.

BILL FOR AUGMENTING THE MILITIA.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he saw no reason why the bill should be continued not only during the whole of the war, but three months after its conclusion. It was probable that the war might still be protracted long after any alarm of invasion had ceased, This bill was only intended to secure the country from the dangers of invasion. He should therefore propose, that the bill should only continue in force two months after the meeting of the next session of parliament.

Mr. Pitt agreed that the space of three months was not absolutely necessary, and that a period of one month might be sufficient for every purpose of security. The amendment of one month was accordingly adopted.

On the clause allowing men with a certain number of children to act as substitutes,

Mr. Sheridan remarked, that in consequence of this clause, a man might be tempted to forsake the habits of sober honesty, to accept the bounty to serve as a substitute, and abandon his children to the care of the parish.

Mr. Sheridan asked, what was the operation of the bill? Were not the men liable to be called out and embodied in a state of imminent danger; and so long as the war continued, what security had they that they should not every moment be taken from their occupations, and separated from their families?

Mr. Pitt replied, and the clause passed.

Mr. Sheridan said, that he now came forward with a proposition which he would state in as few words as possible. His object was to move an amendment in the bill, for the purpose of doing away a distinction which he conceived to be odious and unjust. It was one of those distinctions, however, which he could wish to be done away rather

gradually and quietly than by any clamour of debate. The distinction to which he alluded was, excluding persons from a share in the defence of their country, in consequence of a difference of religious opinion. In the oath taken by those who served in the militia, they were required to swear that they were protestants. This, he remarked, was an exclusion of Roman Catholics inconsistent with the liberality of the present age. It was more particularly inconsistent in a war carried on for the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic religion in France, and in the prosecution of which we had been so intimately connected with Roman Catholic allies. We ought to recollect how many individuals of that description there were in Ireland, whom it was the policy of ministers to conciliate. There could be no doubt that Roman Catholics would fight as bravely and as zealously in defence of the present system as any other class of subjects. He remarked, that the necessity of this oath would operate particularly hard on Roman Catholic gamekeepers; and concluded with moving the amendment, That the words should be struck out of the oath—"I do swear that I am a Protestant."

The Speaker informed Mr. Sheridan, that it was then too late to introduce an amendment, as all the amendments had previously been gone through, but that he would have an opportunity on the third reading of the bill.—The bill was ordered to be read a third time to-morrow, if then engrossed.

NOVEMBER 2.

INVASION.—AUGMENTATION OF THE FORCES.

The report of the cavalry bill was brought up, and the first part of it being read, General Tarleton and Mr. Fox entered into a review of the state of the country, and spoke with great warmth against the measures of the ministry. The Hon. Dudley Ryder replied to Mr. Fox, whose speech, he stated, was such as might have composed a manifesto for a French General after invading Ireland.

Mr. SHERIDAN reprobated the attack that had just been made on his right honorable friend. The honorable gentleman said, he has concluded the most extraordinary and most unprovoked libel I ever heard in this house, by protesting that he had felt himself invincibly called upon to utter every word that he had said. Whence or of what nature, whether political or fanatical, are the calls which so invincibly govern that honorable gentleman's conduct, I neither regard nor inquire; but this I am sure of, that no part of his speech, no part of his fury, no part of his pathos, no part of his invective was called for by any passage or sentiment in the speech of my right honorable friend. He says he has heard my right honorable friend's speech with surprise and regret. Sir, I have heard his with regret, but no surprise. I must regret at this crisis, when we hear so much of the necessity of temper, moderation, and a spirit of unanimity, to find that there are men on whom all those qualities, when evinced by their oponents, are lost and thrown away. I must regret to find that there are such men and such tempers: that with them forbearance begets irritation, candor is repaid by cant, and moderation encourages insult. I appeal to the house whether or not the honorable gentleman's speech justifies this observation. I appeal to them whether any part of my right honorable friend's speech can justify the manner in which it has been attacked. Mark the malice and the bitterness of the honorable gentleman's insinuations. He is graciously pleased to admit that he does not believe that we wish this country to be actually conquered by France. As one of the party to whom he has addressed himself, I bow with all possible gratitude for this instance of his candor; but, says he, their avowed hatred of the present administration is such, that I believe they would not be displeased with that sort of invasion that might throw a degree of dis-

grace on the present ministers. Good God! Sir, what motive does he assign us, and what object does he allot us! In contradiction to all our professions, in contradiction to all the manifestations of our actions, he boldly presumes that we are a set of selfish temporizing traitors, who without meaning to destroy, would wish the safety of the country to be endangered for the gratification of disgracing the present ministers! of bringing, he says, a degree of disgrace upon them! Upon whom? Upon ministers? Begrimed and black with infamy, defeated by their enemies, and degraded in the eyes of Europe already! we, it seems, wish an attack on our country for the purpose of bringing a degree of disgrace on those men, as if it were possible to aggravate the shame and indignity of the situation which they have brought on themselves. On the question of the defence of the country, we have abstained from reproaching them, and they repay us with insult. I, for one, expect no credit or applause from the partizans of these ministers, for the line we have pursued since the first serious intimation of the danger of an invasion; but, desirous as we have shewn ourselves, however distrustful of the Minister, to strengthen the executive government in case of emergency—let them not mistake our present forbearance—let them not misconstrue it as the slightest indication of a departure from a solemn resolution, to look to a day of national justice on the authors of our present calamities, as the only hope of national salvation. Our intermediate moderation they may treat as they please; but it is trying our patience high indeed to hear those ministers, or their advocates, arraigning us as factious traitors, if we dare to utter a sentiment that may bring a degree of disgrace on their characters. It is too much, Sir, that we should be insultingly accused of a crafty plot to disgrace men, whose want of vigor in every enterprize, and whose want of faith in every

engagement, have made their administration at this moment the hope of their enemies, and the fear of their allies. It is too much that such men should arrogantly hold their heads up in this house, where I view them only as arraigned culprits, whose trial is put off. That they should presume that we are as insensible to the injuries they have inflicted, as their own hardened hearts are insensible of remorse; that they should come here with frontless inhumanity, confessing and boasting even that, now at last, they have expended blood and treasure sufficient to sooth their pride, and palliate the concession of their adopting the advice of my right honorable friend, which, if originally adopted, would have saved every one of those lives, and every guinea of that treasure. It is too much to see such men covered equally with crime and shame, besmeared at once with blood and mire, erect their crests, and boldly demand support from the country, because they have endangered it, and attempt to proscribe as factious traitors, those who have fruitlessly endeavored to save it.

But, Sir, the honorable gentleman has accounted for the animated, I will not call it the rancorous, manner in which he has spoken, by asserting my right honorable friend's speech displayed, at a time when moderation is so desirable, the greatest degree of party animosity. On this charge I confidently appeal to all who sit near the honorable gentleman. A speech of more temperate counsel, both in matter and manner, was never heard in this house. Where was the party animosity?—Yet let me retract:—I guess the animosity which the honorable gentleman attributes to such counsel. My right honorable friend's advice was to change the whole system of the Irish government; to govern there as he would govern here, on the principles of equal justice, truth, and plain-dealing. This is the counsel given by my right honorable friend; this is the aggression of his speech. The honorable gentlemen's

right to resent it, as a friend to the present minister—He is right in considering any advice which to take him from the profitable path in which he has trod as the insidious counsel of party animosity. In corruption he has walked—in corruption he has thriven. However calamitous his career to his country and the people, nothing can have been more profitable to himself and his connections. The advice, therefore, that would tempt such a minister to return to the straight paths of truth and honor, may, for ought I know, be plausibly imputed to party animosity. This is the only ground on which I can account for what would otherwise appear a spur of malice without a meaning. Mr. Sheridan adverted to Mr. Ryder's accusation of Mr. Fox for using inflammatory arguments with respect to Ireland, while he at the same time pleaded the danger of answering them. The honorable gentleman had represented the speech of his right honorable friend as containing matter for the manifesto of an invading general. This was at least a confession that the facts he alledged were true, since a general, on invading a country, would never enumerate to the inhabitants grievances which he knew did not exist, else he might be sure his manifesto would be treated with contempt. The best way of preventing a French General from putting inflammatory topics in his manifesto, would be to remove all cause of discontent. It could not be denied that those inflammatory topics, as they were called, were true. It would have been better to have shewn Mr. Fox's assertions to be false, than to have traduced him for making them. Mr. Sheridan warned the minister of the dangerous conclusion he seemed inclined to countenance, that there was no discontent where there was no clamour. "There were those who felt and were silent, and those who felt so, were most to be feared." Mr. Sheridan concluded with a short review of the bill; and though he was thankful for amendments, which he

understood were to be adopted from some suggestions of his, yet he still considered it, "if meant as a measure of force, weak and inefficient; if as a measure of revenue, partial and oppressive." He considered it as extremely objectionable, both in its principles and provisions; and he could not but remark, it had been carried through all its stages by the finance minister, in the presence of the war minister, to whose department it certainly belonged, but who had sat as dumb a spectator of its progress as if he had nothing to do with it.

The house divided—ayes 140; noes 30. The report being brought up, and several clauses added, the bill, with the amendments, was ordered to be engrossed, and read a third time to-morrow, if then engrossed.

GAMEKEEPERS.

Mr. Pitt brought in a bill for enabling His Majesty to require the personal service of a body of men of the description therein mentioned, which was read a first time.

Mr. Sheridan said, he took it for granted, that the bill just brought in was called the gamekeepers' bill. He trusted the Chancellor of the Exchequer would not press the second reading of it that night. He said he objected wholly to the principle of the bill, as being one totally unknown to the constitution of the country, and of the most dangerous tendency. He particularly wished country gentlemen to have an opportunity of looking into it; for his part, he should, in the strongest manner, oppose it, and should take the sense of the house upon it.

The second reading was deferred till the next day.

NOVEMBER 3.

GAMEKEEPERS.

The order of the day for the second reading of the act relative to gamekeepers being read, Mr. Pitt said that doubts had been entertained with regard to this measure, and as the gamekeepers if enrolled, were not intended to be trained, there was no particular reason for pressing the measure forward. He therefore proposed the discussion should be postponed until after the recess, He then moved, "That instead of reading the bill now, it be read on the the 25th of November."

MR. SHERIDAN said, if he agreed to this motion, it must be from a conviction that the minister would never think of this bill again. If he did not think the minister had been better advised upon this subject than he was when he brought it forward, and that the house should hear no more of it, he should have moved that this bill be read this day nine months. If the minister would be frank upon the subject, and confess his error upon the matter, he would say nothing upon it; else he should make his motion now. The house had lately heard a good deal about recognizances. If the right honorable gentleman would enter into a cognizance that the house should hear no more of the subject, he should be satisfied; otherwise he must proceed to shew that the bill was a stigma on the good sense of the house and the nation; a bill of such pernicious and foul principles, he was confident he should persuade the house if not the minister, to reject it with indignation. He had too much esteem for the good sense of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to believe he was the author of such a bill; somebody must have put into his hand, in the form of a bill, a bad translation of a German romance.

DECEMBER 14.

MR. FOX'S MOTION OF CENSURE ON MINISTERS
FOR ADVANCING MONEY TO THE EMPEROR,
WITHOUT THE CONSENT OF PARLIAMENT.

Mr. Fox concluded a long and brilliant speech, with the following motion—"That His Majesty's ministers, having authorised and directed, at different times, without the consent, and during the sitting of parliament, the issue of various sums of money, for the service of his Imperial Majesty, and also for the service of the army under the Prince of Conde, have acted contrary to their duty, and to the trust reposed in them, and have thereby violated the constitutional privileges of this house."

Mr. SHERIDAN: after the manner in which this subject has been debated to-night, I feel it impossible to give a silent vote. To the honorable gentleman behind me (Colonel Gascoign,) I readily yielded precedence, and felt the indulgence usually given to a new speaker, and I carefully abstained from giving any interruption which might add embarrassment to the diffidence natural upon such an occasion. I must confess, however, the speech of that honorable gentleman was not a little singular. He reposed with the utmost confidence upon the truth of my right honorable friend's assertion, that the conduct of ministers in the matter before the house, was neither consistent with the principles of the constitution, nor supported by precedents in parliament. Impressed with this belief, he had come down to the house, determined to commit the absurdity which he had reprobated so much in the conduct of the common hall of the City of London; for, he says, he came down resolved upon the belief he had taken up upon his authority to vote in favor of the proposition of my right honorable friend. Though, upon the statement of my right honorable friend, he assumed that the conduct of ministers was defended by no precedent; since he has heard the artful representation and the eloquent speech of the right honorable gentleman; for dextrous in point of management,

and eloquent in point of manner, it must be admitted to have been ; the honorable gentleman has discovered that the sending of money to the Emperor, without the consent of parliament, is a practice not only justified by example, but interwoven with the very spirit of the constitution ! It is, indeed, extraordinary that a member of parliament, whose duty it is to have some knowledge of the principles of the constitution and the usages of parliament, should confess he only knew the practice to be unconstitutional upon the assertion that it is unprecedented ; and again he should so suddenly take it for granted that it is perfectly justifiable without waiting for any reply to what he has heard in its defence. The honorable gentleman too, in a tone which in another speaker would be considered as harsh, censures the conduct of my honorable friend (Mr. Combe), for acting agreeably to the instructions of his constituents, and thinks he would have been ready to support any proposition which came from the same quarter. But while he thus blames my right honorable friend with no small degree of asperity, and without much appearance of diffidence, he says with triumph, “ I too come here to speak the sense of my constituents as well as my own opinion.” When he came down, however, perfectly determined to support the proposition of my right honorable friend, how is he now so well acquainted with the sentiments of his constituents ? By what means did he contrive to turn so soon the sentiments of his constituents to tally with his change of opinion, and by what new constitutional telegraph has he contrived to procure such rapid information ? In truth, Sir, I wish the honorable member joy of his conversion, and the minister joy of his convert.

But, to proceed to the real question which is the subject of consideration, before any new propositions are offered, since there are already before the house motions so very different from each other,

as must necessarily embrace every variety of opinion. One honorable gentleman, (Mr. Bragge), who moved the amendment, is determined to turn every expression of censure into a testimony of approbation. The honorable gentleman behind me (Mr. Nicholls,) does not approve of the measures of ministers upon this occasion; but he does not wish to shock the ears of the right honorable gentleman, who is so little pleased to hear his faults displayed, and to see his errors recorded, with any bill of indemnity or any implication of censure. He wishes to have a bill, enacting that a similar application of the vote of credit shall not in future be made. To this last proposal I confess, I least of all can agree. I consider it to be a libel upon the constitution—a libel upon our ancestors, to say it requires the provision of new acts of parliament to declare, that the money which the house of commons voted for the purpose of defraying unforeseen charges, and answering a particular species of expenditure, should not be applied to purposes for which it obviously was not intended. The great argument which has converted so many gentlemen, and has had so great weight with the worthy magistrates (who doubtless felt a just reluctance to condemn unheard, especially a minister to whom they owed so many jobs,) the great argument which has produced such distinguished conversions, and such speedy conviction, is this, that the measure at first deemed so reprehensible, is justified by precedent. It is, however, not a little extraordinary that while precedent so powerfully operates conviction, while it so totally changes the complexion of the measure, it is not to be permitted to pass as an additional corroboration of the practice, nor as an example for future imitation. With all these precedents to which they refer, and which they so readily admit, they do not venture to add the present. It is not to be drawn in precedent. In reality while they admit the cases which have been urged in justifica-

tion, they say that the present instance is so superlatively wicked, so scandalous, so dangerous, so fatal in its operation, that it must not be established. It is a stretch beyond all future example, which it is not proper to repeat; it is a rare and singular instance which future parliaments are not to sanction, nor future parliaments to practice.

With regard to the sense of the people collected at common halls, which has been treated so superciliously, I would ask when a meeting is regularly convened for a specific purpose, and their sentiments are properly expressed, why they should not be entitled to respect? The assertions of the worthy alderman (Curtis) that the common hall in the City of London was not regularly conducted, is an unfair reflection upon the chief magistrate, who, had he been a member of the house, would have very emphatically answered such a charge. But if the complaint of the worthy alderman proves any thing, it proves that in the City of London such was the general disapprobation which the conduct of ministers has excited, that the result of the meeting was obvious; that he might have heard it from the first person he met in the street. I don't know, indeed, by whom the information of the probable result was given to the worthy alderman, whether by his correspondent, Mr. Massinghi, or the communicative hair-dresser. As to the regularity in the calling of the meeting, I am informed that one person, whether properly or improperly, but certainly consistently with custom, had not indeed signed the requisition himself, but gave authority for that purpose. But to return to the real point before the house: I cannot help regarding it as a curious circumstance that so many gentlemen appear to have come down pre-determined to support the opinion they had originally adopted. The honorable gentleman (Mr. Bragge) seems to have had his mind previously made up, and his proposition previously arranged. He does not seem to have been aware

that a great part of the sums sent abroad were remitted to the army of Conde, to which his motion does not at all infer. The amendment is wholly silent upon this part of the motion of my right honorable friend. What is this but an implied censure upon the transaction so far as it relates to the Prince of Conde? If it rescues from censure that part which concerns the Emperor, it leaves the other to stand upon the journals with the brand which is implied from its being passed over without notice, while the other is held up to approbation. This disposal of the money is likewise stated by the right honorable gentleman to be a justifiable use of this vote of credit, though in reality, part of the money was contained in the army extraordinaries, to which the defence does not apply. The point indeed is of the utmost importance, and the decision which the house shall pronounce upon its merit, is of equal consequence to maintain the dignity of its privileges and the respect of the constitution. My right honorable friend, in employing that copiousness of argument and the power of eloquence which belongs to him, felt the necessity of bringing forward every consideration that could induce the house, in circumstances like the present, to agree to any vote of censure. He entered into a detail, which, not the subject, but the dispositions of the house, demanded. Nor is it wonderful that the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) swerved so frequently from the point of the question, and endeavoured to fix the attention of the house upon what tended to mislead their judgment. With deference, however, to the example of my right honorable friend, I cannot help thinking that the real question lies within a narrow compass. It is the particular pride and the unrivalled glory of the British constitution that its characters are so clear, so precise, so intelligible, that it is impossible to transgress its spirit, and to violate its principles without the crime being easily detected and the

guilt clearly exposed. If there be any point upon which all declamation, all sophistry, all soaring flights of eloquence, all heroic professions of patriotism or disinterestedness, all calculated to dazzle or to amuse, are completely lost, it is upon a question like this. The proposition which my right honorable friend has moved consists of two parts, perfectly distinct. That part which we bring forward as a charge, we are bound to prove; but when we have established the principles of the constitution, and alledged the facts by which they are violated, the *onus* lies upon the right honorable gentleman to show that the statement is fallacious, or to produce the circumstances of palliation by which the transgression is to be excused. In this view, therefore, we have to prove that certain sums are destined and appropriated to particular services. Here I will not examine whether the power of granting supplies and controlling their application be as ancient as the government itself, and coeval with the existence of the constitution. It is sufficient that I refer to the best times in which its principles were established, and in which they were defended, by the struggle of the people for freedom. This salutary regulation arose from the abuses of the government, from the misconduct of ministers, from the treachery of parliament, from tyranny, from corruption. The reign of Charles the Second is a sufficient authority for the appeal to history. At the revolution it was solemnly recognized, and since that period it has been interwoven with our parliamentary usage. In this review I cannot but wonder at the stress which has been laid upon the precedents which have been quoted. It is arguing from the exception against the rule; it is erecting the deviation into the standard. But even these precedents, upon which so much stress has been laid; neither apply to the present case nor justify the particular measure. Among the earliest precedents which have been quoted is, that in 1706, of the advance to the Duke of Savoy,

to the amount of 47,000*l*. If gentlemen, however, will take the trouble to look into the journals they will find that this sum was granted during the recess of parliament; that not only was the ally of this country placed in perilous circumstances, but that Turin was actually in a state of siege. A demand was made for 50,000*l*. and the letter which Mr. Secretary Harley sent in answer to the Ambassador of Savoy, will at once explain the principles of the constitution and the inapplicability of the precedent. The letter states, that it is not practicable, according to the custom of the constitution, while parliament is not sitting, to comply with the request; yet, in the pressing circumstances of the case, her Majesty was willing to grant a certain sum to be deducted out of the subsidy that was paid to the Duke of Savoy. Will it then be said, that in circumstances like these, when there was a certainty that the money was employed in a manner to which parliament had consented, when it was to be deducted from a subsidy that had regularly been granted, will it be said that, either in the extent or in the principle, either in the circumstances or in its conduct, the present measure could be justified by an appeal to the authority of this precedent. This is the first of those four boasted precedents which have so readily convinced the right honorable gentlemen of the propriety of the minister's conduct. The next precedent was in 1742. The money was then disposed of when parliament was not sitting, and it was afterwards moved in that house, that the sending sums to any foreign prince, without the consent of parliament, was a dangerous misapplication of the public money, and highly destructive of the constitution. On these words an amendment was moved, adding that the measure was unavoidable, and that it was necessary for the interests of the common cause. At that time, therefore, the measure was condemned, and the only justification set up was its indispensable necessity. If this necessity could now

be proved by ministers, then we, said Mr. Sheridan, have no ground to stand on. The next precedent was the case of Holland, in 1617, when the money was taken out of the secret-service money; and it is well known, that, by Mr. Burke's bill, if the Secretary of State makes oath the money was actually employed for the interest of the country, no farther inquiry can take place.

Such then, are the precedents by which so much effect is produced, by which the jealousy of the privileges of the house is to be superseded, on the credit of which every idea of atonement for our violated laws and constitution is to be given up. The right honorable gentlemen says, that any farther precedent during times which we consider at the worst of times, and during a parliament which we have deemed so hostile to the liberties of the country, would be received with little respect. It is true that the times of the last parliament, and the administration of the right honorable gentleman, I do not hold in the highest veneration. It is true that I do not think that parliament a meritorious parliament. What, however, must have been the opinion of the right honorable gentleman himself of that parliament, when out of the alarmists who have seceded from our ranks, he has sent so many to shelter themselves from danger upon the higher ground, and to hide their heads in coronets from the form which they affected to dread? Surely if the right honorable gentleman entertains so high an opinion of that parliament, he would not thus anxiously have removed so many of those who composed the part which merited the distinction with which he has thought proper to honor them. The right honorable gentleman wonders, that after having allowed the subject to pass over upon the first day on which it was brought forward, we should now so keenly make it the object of investigation. He seems to conceive us to be bound by the same rules which limit the country in the prosecution of a

thief, where, unless the hue and cry be raised, the benefit of the prosecution is taken away. We have been called, ironically I suppose, a vigilant opposition ; and, God knows, there is no reason to remind us that it is small. But I am ready to put in for my share of blame for want of vigilance, when the circumstance which is now erected into a precedent took place upon the communication of the intended loan to the Emperor, by the King's message, in the year 1795. But even any negligence which might have been displayed upon that occasion is by no means of such a magnitude as our acquiescing in the present measure would imply. The situations were very different. Then there was a certainty that the advances to the Emperor would be repaid, because they were to be deducted from the loan which was to be granted. In the present case, the circumstances are very different. The concealment which has taken place effectually precludes the house from remedying any negligence that had been committed, or repairing any mischief that has been produced. This least of all can be of any authority to the right honorable gentleman ; and I defy any man to say, that the circumstances of the case will bear him out in the conclusion which he is desirous to establish.

The right honorable gentleman says, that he has taken larger votes of credit in proportion to the general expence of the war than any former minister ; but if he applies the funds which are destined for other objects towards expenses for which he ought particularly to have provided, of what importance is it, though it were true, that there are fewer extraordinaryes ? We only ask, that he will not delude the country, that he will not apply grants for prospective services to those which already have been incurred. If it was not to conceal entirely what was in his contemplation, why was it unfit that the house should be acquainted with the intention to take the Prince of Conde's corps into our pay ? He accepted bills before the vote of credit was

granted, and had even begun to pay them. The house of commons was deceived by a false account, which stated, that \$00,000*l*. had been issued to the pay-master of the forces, while in reality it had been sent to pay the French troops we had taken into our service. If, wherever the words "vote of credit" occurred, according to the real intention of that sum, the house should substitute "provision for unforeseen expenses," the absurdity of applying it to services already incurred would be completely detected. What appearance would it have to continue this apparent inconsistency with the absurdity of the argument of the right honorable gentleman? The right honorable gentleman says, that it would not have been equally effectual to have tried the experiment of a loan, and that this mode has succeeded. Here he enters into a high-sounding description of the splendid achievements of the Austrians; extols their triumphs in a tone of as high exultation as if it were recording his own exploits, and praises their masterly retreat, which I am sure was not conducted with greater dexterity than that of the right honorable gentleman to-day. All this brilliant declamation is very fine, but it is nothing to the purpose. If the Austrians have achieved all this success, might not the same advantages have resulted from a more constitutional application of the public money? I am ready to give the right honorable gentleman credit for the truth which he may occasionally communicate to the house; and I believe he speaks correctly when he tells us, that last year, by the measures he adopted, he gave one chance for the safety of Europe. The real matter of congratulation, then was, that the French, in their victorious career, had not the whole of Germany; and the triumph of the right honorable gentleman concludes his panegyric with a quotation which has no great application to the relative situation of our allies at the present moment. The right honorable gentleman says, could parliament have

judged of the propriety of the measure? I answer yes; and might have judged too, upon the same grounds upon which ministers formed their judgment. The argument, that it was dangerous to make the measure public, because the sum granted might have appeared inadequate, is applicable to every vote of subsidy, to every vote of supply, to every measure of preparation, to the votes for the army and navy, and to every department of the government. If it might be attended with a slight degree of disadvantage to publish that information to the enemy, it was more than compensated by fairness, by straight-forwardness, and by manliness of conduct. Indeed, the principle on which this measure was defended, appears more dangerous than even any application of it can be thought impolitic. It arrogates to ministers a right to judge of the extent, as well as the mode of public expenditure; it is erecting the minister into an absolute dictator; it is more than mortal presumption; it is a pretention beyond humanity to claim; it is usurping the attributes of the Deity, the power of omniscience and infallibility, the power of refusing the desires and disappointing the wishes of those over whom they rule. Joined with the other part of the conduct of ministers, it, indeed, forms the subject of serious alarm. If they claim the right of landing foreign troops without consent of parliament, and of paying them by this delicate process, without application to this house, where is the security left for our liberties and for our constitution? One honorable gentleman thought he saw in the vote of credit, an intimation of sending money to the Emperor; but if he saw it then, it must have been equally discernable to every gentleman in the kingdom, and thus the mischief arising from publicity must have been incurred. But, he would ask, upon what pretence could it be inferred from the vote of credit, that any part of it was destined to a different purpose from the vote of credit of the preceeding year? When

the minister had abandoned his first intention of raising a loan of three millions for the Emperor, he conceived that he had also abandoned his purpose of remitting any money to the Emperor without the sanction of parliament. It was evident that the minister did not wish to hang a German loan about the neck of the dissolving parliament, because he well knew it would hurt his friends in the event of a new election ; it was understood that he meant to keep his motion for an early attempt on the maiden affections of the new parliament ; but why then did he not apply to this new parliament ? Instead of doing so, he has the audacity to say, “ I felt myself bound to keep my promise pledged to the Emperor for farther remittances.” But was this a declaration fit to make to that house or the country, when the money was to be taken from the pockets of a British parliament ? And, was a vote of thanks now to be moved for what was deserving the most severe reprobation ? Mr. Sheridan considered this as a new process of smuggling money out of the kingdom ; as a fraud likewise on the subscribers to the new loan ; because it was not till after the subscription to the new loan, that it came out that there was a sum of 1,200,000*l.* minus of the specie of this country. Mr. Sheridan concluded with observing, that there was only one point which he should notice, and that was the *argumentum ad hominem* which the right honorable gentleman used against his right honorable friend. But with what ill grace did this come from him, whose whole ministerial conduct had been one continued attack upon the liberties of his country. Were it possible that his venerable and illustrious father could look down upon the three last years of his history, to see him sit to applaud his confidential friends in reviling the sacred institution of juries, and that one of the most illustrious pensioners of the crown had not even been rebuked for saying, that courts of justice were become nothing more than schools for sedition ; to

see him covering the whole face of the country with barracks and bastilles, without even submitting the expense of their erection as a question to parliament; to see the whole country under military government, and the people placed under the subjection of the bayonet; while, as if this were not sufficient, their mouths were shut up, and themselves prevented from meeting to consult on their grievances; and proceeding in his climax of constitutional violence, wresting from them, one after another, all their rights, till he came at last to take out of the hands of the representatives the guardian disposal of their money? When recollected the means by which that right honorable gentleman came into power, the arts by which he had retained it, and the contempt with which he had treated the house of commons, and the disregard of its declared opinion which he had shewn, how could it be thought that he would resign himself to its judgment with that submission which the conclusion of his speech bespoke? No credit could be given to that idle rhodomontade, that unmeaning cant of resignation. Of all the ministers that ever directed the affairs of this country, the right honorable gentleman was the man who had employed in his administration the worst of means, and entailed upon his country the greatest of evils. If two motives could be assigned for his conduct; if it could be said on the one hand that he might be guided by views of power and sentiments of ambition, or by feelings of patriotism and virtue, he should not hesitate to ascribe the former to a minister whose whole life had marked the same total disregard for the one, as implicit devotion to the other.

An amendment was moved by Mr. Bragge, justifying the conduct of ministers on the plea of special necessity. The house divided on Mr. Fox's motion, Ayes, 81; noes 285. The amendment was then put and carried.

DECEMBER 16.

GENERAL FITZPATRICK'S MOTION RELATIVE
TO GENERAL LA FAYETTE, &c.

The following motion was made by General Fitzpatrick at the conclusion of a long speech abounding with eloquence and the most pathetic appeals to the feelings of the house. "That an humble address be presented to His Majesty, to represent to His Majesty, that it appears to this house, that the detention of General La Fayette, Bureau de Pusy, and Latour Maubourgh, in the prison of His Majesty's ally, the Emperor of Germany, is highly injurious to His Imperial Majesty, and to the common cause of the allies; and humbly to implore His Majesty to intercede in such manner as to his wisdom shall seem most proper for the deliverance of these unfortunate persons."

MR. SHERIDAN. Sir, I rise with the utmost readiness and satisfaction to second the motion, which has just been made. But I will not for a moment prevent you from stating the question to the house, nor will I risque the chance of weakening the impression made upon the understanding and feelings of the house, by adding any thing to what has been so forcibly and eloquently advanced by my honorable friend, till I hear what can possibly be urged in opposition to that irresistible appeal which he has made to the justice and humanity of a British legislature.

Mr. Wilberforce moved as amendment, that in the room of the words of the original motion, be substituted the following: "That an humble address be presented to His Majesty the propriety of His Majesty's using his good offices with his ally the Emperor of Germany, for the liberation of the General La Fayette, and Messieurs La Tour Maubourg, and Bureau de Pusy."—The amendment being regularly proposed, and the question being put upon it,

Mr. Sheridan observed, that it was not his practice to obtrude himself upon the attention of the house, after a subject had been fully discussed by his friends, nor would he have troubled them now, since so little, and that little worse than nothing, had been advanced in opposition to the eloquent and pathetic speech of his honorable friend, had not

they been brought into a situation of difficulty, in consequence of the amendment which had been proposed. The honorable gentleman, he believed, had suggested the amendment (at least he gave him credit for the motive) from a wish to render the motion more palatable to the house; and it certainly had met the entire approbation of one honorable gentleman (Mr. Windham), who had previously shewed signs of being desirous to speak, but who had remained apparently quite at his ease since the amendment had been proposed. While he was congratulating himself, however, upon the acquisition of the influence, the authority, and what was not the least consideration of that honorable gentleman, he was concerned to find that it had made them lose the vote of a learned gentleman (the Master of the Rolls). [Here there was a cry of No! No!] He hoped, however, that the motion would not be got rid of by a quibble, but they would come to a fair and intelligible issue; and that conceiving it, as they must, to be an affair in which it was disgraceful for our ally, the Emperor, to act, and in which it was disgraceful for the government of Great Britain not to interfere, they would, in a bold and manly way, vote an address to His Majesty, immediately, to use his influence with the Court of Vienna in behalf of the unfortunate persons who were the subject of this evening's debate. An honorable gentleman asked, if we were prepared to break off our alliance with the Emperor, if our intercessions failed of success? In the first place, there was no reason to anticipate a failure before the attempt was made; and, in the next place, the failure of the attempt by no means implied the necessity of breaking off the alliance. With respect to the precedent of Mr. Asgill, which had been disputed, the objection was not well founded; for, though the application originated in the Queen, it came immediately from the King of France. And in the present instance, he was of opinion that it would be infinitely to the honor of those admirable

feelings which our own illustrious Queen was well known to possess, were she voluntarily to interfere in behalf of those amiable but unfortunate persons, who are now languishing in hopeless captivity in the dungeons of Olmutz. The gentlemen on the other side of the house seemed to triumph in the silence of the honorable gentleman (Mr. Windham); and the reason, he firmly believed, was this: that he might draw aside the mysterious veil from this cruel, barbarous, and vindictive proceeding, with that manly and generous indiscretion by which the house knew his character to be marked. When he rose first, his right honorable friend (Mr. Pitt) put him aside, intimating to him, my nothing will be better than your something; my quibbles are better than your sophistry; and if I say nothing to the purpose, at least I will not betray any secret that ought to be concealed. In fact, Mr. Sheridan believed, that Mr. Windham's tongue was bound by the same cause as the Emperor's hands; and the house knew pretty well who was the gaoler. As a friend to freedom, he would rejoice when General La Fayette recovered his liberty; and as an old friend of Mr. Windham, he would feel no small satisfaction when he recovered his speech. He was sure also, that he would not find the house like the adder, which is deaf to the voice of the charmer. He really wished that some other gentleman in His Majesty's councils had come forward; he hoped, at least, that an amendment would be proposed, that the discussions should not be confined in future to one side of the house, excepting in cases of special necessity. The right honorable gentleman seemed to feel very acutely upon the subject; the house, however, would not give him credit for the reality of those feelings, when they recollected that three years ago he condemned the proceedings against La Fayette as worthy of the execration of mankind, if the facts alledged were true; and now he came forward, affecting still to doubt of their truth, not

having taken any measure to ascertain whether they were real or fabulous. He had laid down a general principle about jurisprudence, which he endeavoured to apply to the case of La Fayette, as if that unfortunate person had been imprisoned for a criminal offence, and had not been a prisoner of war. He could see no other motive for the unprecedented rigor which had been employed against that exalted character, than that which was suggested from his being a moderate and steady friend to liberty; a motive which was not so likely to influence the ministers of any government in Europe, as the present ministers of His Britannic Majesty—ministers, who, on all occasions, had shewn themselves the enemies of every species of reform, the patrons of every abuse, and whose uniform system it had been to extinguish the spirit of liberty both in this and in other countries. The right honorable gentleman argued, that we had no right to interfere; and that if we did interfere, we were uncertain of success. With respect to the success likely to attend our interference, that could not be ascertained till an application was made. Besides, if it was a disgraceful affair, had we no interest in the character of the Emperor? Were we not engaged in a common cause with him, for the attainment of a common object. It was one of the charges recorded against Mr. Hastings, that he had suffered allies in India to commit an act which disgraced the British name. But why had he recourse to India? Had not the right honorable gentleman compelled the King of Naples and the states of Genoa (*vide* Debrett's State Papers) to take a part against France? He referred to his own authentic papers upon the subject. For the character of General La Fayette, he had the highest veneration. He believed him to be a man of high and inflexible honour, and that he might vie with the brightest characters in the English history. To the spirit of a Hampden he united the loyalty of a Falkland. Had Louis XVI. not fallen a sacrifice to the fury of a mob, rendered

desperate by the abuses and corruptions of the old government, which had bred up the race of sanguinary monsters, who perpetrated the atrocious act; and had General La Fayette returned to Paris upon the restoration of tranquillity, to get the reward of his conduct; if the King had thrown him, his wife, and her daughters, into a dungeon, there was not a humane man in Europe would not have said, that he ill deserved to re-ascend his throne, and that he ought to have his crown torn from his head. Yet this was the conduct which the governments in Europe had pursued to those unfortunate persons, to their eternal shame and disgrace. What added to the cruelty of the punishment, was the helplessness of the victim. He was not in a situation, when he was taken, to be demanded back by the government of France: but, had those foul insinuations, with which his character was attempted in this country to be blackened, been true; had he betrayed his trust, deceived his master, and, finally, imbrued his hands in the blood of his sovereign, then he would have been reclaimed by the French government; then the princes of Europe, trembling at the command of the Directory, would have ordered the doors of his prison to be thrown open, and General La Fayette might even have been a member of that Directory, with which they were now obliged to treat. If the court of Vienna was mean enough to take advantage of his helpless situation, Mr. Sheridan hoped that the French government, overlooking the past, would reclaim La Fayette and his fellow-sufferers, as French citizens. How well such conduct would suit the generosity and magnanimity of the French republic; and what a contrast it would be of republican resentment at monarchical gratitude, that from this atheistical government we should learn the principle of the forgiveness of injuries, and lessons of eternal vengeance only from the regular Christian governments of kings!

Mr. Sheridan concluded by repeating an observa-

tion which he had made last year, and which appeared to be something like a paradox, namely, that there never was a country in which there was more private worth or more public depravity than in this; and in expressing his firm conviction, that were the present question to be decided by private feeling, the minister would be left in a minority as small as the number of the speakers.

General Fitzpatrick having acquiesced in the amendment, the house divided thereon. Ayes 50; Noes 132. The question was therefore negatived.

DECEMBER 17.

On the 17th, the following message was brought from His Majesty:—

GEORGE R.

His Majesty thinks proper to acquaint the house of commons, that he is at present engaged in concerting measures with his allies, in order to be fully prepared for the vigorous and effectual prosecution of the war, if the failure of His Majesty's earnest endeavours to effect a general peace, on secure and honorable terms, should unfortunately render another campaign unavoidable: and His Majesty will not fail to take the first opportunity to communicate the result of these discussions to the house. In the interval, His Majesty conceives that it may be of the greatest importance to the common cause, that His Majesty should be enabled to continue such temporary advances for the service of the Emperor as may be indispensably necessary, with a view to military operations being prosecuted with vigor and effect at an early period; and His Majesty recommends it to the house to consider of making such provision as may appear to them to be most expedient for this purpose.

G. R.

On the 19th, the message was taken into consideration, and Mr. Pitt moved the address, as usual, an echo of the message.

Mr. SHERIDAN wished to ask the minister two questions—the one a matter of fact, the other a matter of opinion. Whether the whole amount of the money advanced to the Emperor (excepting a small sum which was retained out of the last payment to his Imperial Majesty) is not now due to this country? And while this sum is four millions and an half, and the Emperor is applying for another loan, if that sum should be doubled, what security have we

that any punctuality will be observed by the Emperor in his future payments?

Mr. Sheridan again rose, and after a short introduction, proposed the following amendment at the end of the address :

“Your Majesty’s faithful commons having thus manifested their determination to enable your Majesty to give such assistance to your Majesty’s ally the Emperor, as may be indispensably necessary in the unfortunate event of an unfavourable issue to the present negotiations for peace, cannot omit this occasion of expressing their deep regret, that your Majesty’s ministers should, in recent instances, have *presumed* to issue similar assistances to the Emperor *without* any previous application to parliament so to do ; thereby acting, *as your Majesty’s gracious message appears in a great measure to admit*, in defiance of the established practice, and in violation of the constitutional privileges of this house.”

Negatived without a division.

The house then resolved itself into a committee of supply, when the following resolution was moved :—

*“That a sum not exceeding 500,000*l.* be given to His Majesty to be applied to the service of the Emperor, to be issued at such times and in such a manner as His Majesty may see most proper.”*

Mr. Sheridan observed, the minister was powerful in speech, and seemed to have had a patent for putting words together ; yet he had discretion enough to be silent on proper occasions, as was then the case with respect to one point. On a former night he had stated the necessity of concealing from the public the knowledge of the money sent to the continent ; therefore, it was impossible that a fair account could have been given to the house. There were other gentlemen who stood in a situation of responsibility, besides the minister, and he wished to hear from them some information on the subject. He wished to know accurately, whether any interest had been paid for the money already borrowed by the Emperor ; or whether deductions had been made

for that purpose out of the instalments advanced to his Imperial Majesty? It was material that the house know this, or know whether the Emperor would have sent the interest, provided no advances had been made from this country, in order that they might judge of his future punctuality. The British parliament must expect the punctuality of a merchant, and not depend on the gallantry of a hero for the payment of these sums. He would, therefore, add, as an amendment to the resolution, "That 500,000*l.* should be granted to the Emperor when his engagements upon the last loan are fulfilled, or satisfactory reasons given for the failure."

Mr. Sheridan contended, that the guarantee for the payment of the interest of the loan, and the sinking fund for the redemption of the principal, stood upon the same ground, and that the creditors of the Emperor in each case look to the public as their guarantee. He doubted whether, without advancing fresh sums to the Emperor, he could have paid the interest of the former sums borrowed, and thought this held out but poor encouragement to expect the repayment of the principal sums advanced. He wished to know also, whether the *actions* of the Emperor's Austrian dominions were deposited in the Bank of England as a security? Whether the 5,000*l.* monthly, or 60,000*l.* annually, had been paid according to the treaty, and had been applied towards the buying up of the bonds at the market price, and for the purpose of a sinking fund for the redemption of the capital of the loan. In short, Mr. Sheridan insisted, that there was a failure on the Emperor's side of every part of the treaty, and that the 500,000*l.* now proposed to be advanced, was to enable him to fulfil his former engagement with the British public.

Mr. Sheridan wished to know whether ministers considered themselves authorised to take the Prince of Conde's army in British pay, and continuing such payments, without the previous consent and

approbation of parliament? For this measure, he observed, was virtually the same as increasing the loan to the Emperor.

Mr. Sheridan's amendment was put and negatived without a division. The original address was then voted.

DECEMBER 22.

BILL FOR THE BETTER SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE OF THE POOR.

Mr. Pitt moved for leave to bring in this bill, observing at the same time, that there was no subject which more deserved the attention of the house, or which required a more careful and deliberate consideration.

MR. SHERIDAN said, he certainly agreed that there was no subject which was more deserving of the attention of the house, or which more demanded their most diligent and serious investigation. He hoped, however, that the right honorable gentleman would persevere in maturing his system, as he had taken the subject out of the hands of an honorable friend of his (Mr. Whitbread), who would have prosecuted it, if not with equal ability, yet with equal zeal, and, perhaps, with a greater degree of industry. He wished that the right honorable gentleman had at least entered into a short explanation of the particulars of the plan which he now proposed to bring forward. When he talked of the approbation given to the objects of the bill, he ought to have recollected that sanction had been given in a former parliament. He would, however, when the subject was brought forward in detail, pay it the closest attention, and he trusted that it would be attended with the utmost advantage to the class of the community for whose interests it was professedly brought forward.

Mr. Pitt denied having taken the measure out of the hands of Mr. Whitbread; on the contrary, the bill which he now proposed to be brought in, was contrived on a much more enlarged scale, and which, when put in execution, would supersede the necessity of the other.

Mr. Sheridan reminded the right honorable gentleman that the bill which his honorable friend (Mr. Whitbread) moved for leave to bring in, referred not to a detached measure which he had in view, but was a part of an extensive plan which he then had in agitation, if the house had permitted him to prosecute it.

FEBRUARY 27, 1797.

STOPPAGE OF CASH PAYMENTS AT THE BANK.

*In January, 1795, the Directors of the Bank of England informed the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that it was their wish, "that he would arrange his finances for the year, in such a manner as not to depend on any farther assistance from them." These remonstrances were renewed in April and July following; and on the 8th of October, they sent a written paper to the minister, which concluded by stating, "the absolute necessity which they conceived to exist for diminishing the sum of their present advances to government; the last having been granted with great reluctance on their part, on his pressing solicitations" In an interview with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which took place on the 23d of the same month, on the loans to the Emperor being mentioned, the governor assured Mr. Pitt, "that another loan of that sort would go far to ruin the country;" and on the 9th of February, 1797, the Directors ordered the governor to inform the minister, "that under the present state of the Bank's advances to government here, to agree with his request of making a farther advance of 1,500,000*l.* as a loan to Ireland, would threaten ruin to the Bank, and most probably bring the Directors to shut up their doors." With this cause, another springing out of the war powerfully co-operated. This was, the dread of an invasion, which had induced the farmers and others, resident in the parts distant from the metropolis, to withdraw their money from the hands of those bankers with whom it was deposited. The run, therefore, commenced upon the country banks, and the demand for specie soon reached the metropolis. In this alarming state the ministry thought themselves compelled to interfere, and an order of the Privy Council was issued on the 26th of February, prohibiting the Directors of the Bank from "issuing any cash in payment till the sense of parliament could be taken on that subject, and the proper measures adopted thereupon for maintaining the means of circulation, and supporting the public and commercial credit of the kingdom at this important juncture." On the 27th the following message was delivered to the house of commons:—*

"George R.

"His Majesty thinks it proper to communicate to the house of commons, without delay, the measure adopted to obviate the effects

which might be occasioned by the unusual demand of specie lately made from different parts of the country in the metropolis. The peculiar nature and exigency of the case appeared to require, in the first instance, the measure contained in the order of council which His Majesty has directed to be laid before the house. In recommending this important subject to the immediate and serious attention of the house of commons, His Majesty relies with the utmost confidence on the experienced wisdom and firmness of his parliament for taking such measures as may be best calculated to meet any temporary pressure, and to call forth, in the most effectual manner, the extensive resources of his kingdoms in support of their public and commercial credit, and in defence of their dearest interests. "G. R."

Mr. Pitt moved "That His Majesty's message be taken into consideration to-morrow,"

Mr. SHERIDAN rose, not to pursue the observations which had been made upon the present critical state of the country, but to express his surprise that the consideration of the order in council should be put off for a single day. In the first part of the order he found nothing but an opinion respecting the circumstances of the Bank, as connected with the present state of public affairs: the conclusion of it contained nothing less than a positive requisition of all the cash in the Bank—a requisition which, however strange and unconstitutional, the Bank Directors thought themselves bound in duty to obey. The order certainly was of such a nature that the house had a right to expect some explanation on the subject. The conduct of the minister, however, had suggested to him a motion, upon which he would certainly take the sense of the house, and upon which they ought not to delay a single hour in expressing an opinion. He should endeavour to abstain from expressing those sentiments of indignation which every man must feel on this occasion. He could not, however, but remark, that the right honorable gentleman was now acting upon the same system of delusion which had characterised all his administration. He entertained no doubts about the solidity of the Bank, and would rely more upon their own statement of their situation, than any declaration of that house; nor did he object

to the public pledging their security for the outstanding engagements of the Bank ; but he remonstrated strongly against the mode in which the business was brought before the legislature. What right had government to exercise a compulsory power over the Bank of England? The fair way would have been for the Bank to have laid a statement of their situation before the house, to have described the causes to which their embarrassments were to be imputed, and to have prayed for that interference in their behalf, which he was sure the legislature, upon proper grounds, would have been ready to grant. Instead of this, an order of council had been issued putting the whole cash of the Bank in requisition. And upon what pretence? To satisfy the necessary demands for the public service ! What right had government to the cash of the Bank more than to the cash of any individual in the kingdom ? As well, and with full as much justice, might the right honorable gentleman have put in requisition the money of those wealthy placemen and pensioners who were planted around him. Nay, this would not have been so bad ; for in the present instance, by an act of compulsion upon the Bank, he was obliging it to break faith with its creditors. And what were these public exigencies on account of which this strange and unprecedented measure was adopted ? They must necessarily be such as the public paper securities could not satisfy. With respect to the appointment of a committee to inquire into the affairs of the Bank, it was notorious that a leak had sprung in the vessel, and it was pretty evident that it had been occasioned by the exportation of specie to foreign countries ; as to the criminality of the pilot, that would be matter for future consideration. Taking that for granted, therefore, of which every one was perfectly convinced, that the immense exportation of specie was the cause of the present embarrassments, he should move, “ That it is the opinion of this house that no farther expor-

tation of specie or gold should take place for the use of the Emperor, or any other foreign power, until the sense of parliament should have been taken on the subject, upon a full review of the causes of the present exigencies of the public." It might be said that in a season of such great difficulties, it was not probable that the minister of the country would take a step which would add so much to their pressure. With regard to his professions, he had seen him so often abandon them, that he no longer reposed any trust either in his representations or his promises. He now placed as little confidence in his discretion. After his boasting but a few months ago of the high state of public credit; after vaunting his address in filching so much money from the country without its being publicly known; and after bringing down the communication of this day, what confidence could he (Mr. Sheridan) place in his discretion? It was not enough for the house to leave him to be guided by the dictates of his prudence, for prudence they found by dire experience he did not possess; nor was it their duty to be satisfied by his professions, for they had witnessed his promises no sooner made than broken; they ought to say not only that he ought not, but that he dared not to do it. He (the Chancellor of the Exchequer) might plead that the faith of the country was pledged to the Emperor; but was not the faith of the Bank also pledged to its creditors? If the right honorable gentleman urged, that withholding supplies from the Emperor would occasion great inconveniencies in carrying on the war, he would grant that this might be true; but of two evils they were to choose the least, and then he would ask if there was any man who thought that were we to go on furnishing money to the imperial army, that this country would find any compensation to their possible, or even probable successes, for the certain evils which it would thereby sustain? He concluded with repeating his determination to take

the sense of the house upon his motion, and with expressing his opinion, that if it was negatived the country would one day consider them as the accomplices of ministers in promoting its destruction.

Mr. Pitt and Mr. Dundas replied to Mr. Sheridan.

Mr. Sheridan said, that the gentlemen on the other side, because they could not fairly meet, seemed determined not to understand his motion. In its nature it was perfectly distinct from the discussion of to-morrow. [Here Mr. Sheridan desired the concluding clause of the motion to be read.] To-morrow an inquiry was to be moved into the situation of the Bank. His object was merely to pledge the house to enquire into the circumstances which rendered that measure necessary, before any remittances could be sent to the Emperor. The discussion of to-morrow was not stated to be for any such inquiry, and therefore he wished ministers to be prevented from sending any money abroad till it was obtained. The right honorable secretary said, that the facts on which the inquiry into the circumstances of the Bank were founded, were not at all connected with the remittances to the Emperor, and that it was quite on the other side: this was something strange indeed. He had never heard, however, that there had been any remittances from the Emperor to this country, if this was the meaning of its being quite on the other side, for the Emperor had never even yet fulfilled the engagements which this country had guaranteed; or, perhaps, the right honorable secretary meant, that the more money was sent abroad the more would remain at home. He was not a little surprised, too, to hear that the present motion should be construed to infer, that no more money was to be sent to the Emperor; strange indeed it was, that the right honorable gentleman should not understand the difference between deferring and refusing payment, when they had come forward with a proclamation, by

which the Bank were authorized to refuse payment of their notes for a limited time. He therefore contended, that it was fit that ministers, in the present circumstances, ought to be prevented from sending any money abroad, till parliament had fully investigated the causes from which the distress arose.

The house then divided ; for the order of the day 247 ; against it 70 ; majority against Mr. Sheridan's motion 177.

MR. PITT'S POOR BILL.

Mr. Sheridan said, that he had paid great attention to the present bill, and he must say, that a worse bill he had never seen. Its principle was detestable. It was a libel on the rich, and a libel on the industry of the country. He wished with the honorable gentleman, Mr. Jolliffe, that the bill were entirely given up. He wished, if it was to be still kept up, that a day should be set aside for the discussion of it, that it might be thrown out at once, and he had no doubt but he should be able to convince some gentlemen that its principle was so foul, that it could not be entertained by the house for a single moment.

The further consideration of the report of this bill was put off to a future day.

FEBRUARY 28.

STOPPAGE OF CASH PAYMENT AT THE BANK.

The order of the day for taking into consideration His Majesty's message being read, Mr. Pitt moved the address, which was carried. He then moved "That a secret committee be appointed to ascertain the total account of the outstanding demands on the Bank of England, and likewise of the funds for discharging the same ; and that they do also report their opinion of the necessity of providing for the conformation and continuance of the measures taken in pursuance of the minute of council on the 26th instant."

Mr. SHERIDAN said, after the last speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he had been ex-

tremely impatient in reply. He had been very ready, however, to give way to other gentlemen who wished to deliver their opinions; with the most of which he had been extremely pleased. He would have regretted, particularly, had he prevented the honorable gentleman opposite to him (Mr. Dent) from favoring the house with the observations they had just now heard. The honorable gentleman began with lamenting the scurrilous mode in which the debate had been conducted on both sides of the house, and by way of a lesson of politeness, he added that he believed the motive of one side was to keep in, whereas the other was to get into place. A very desirable object to be sure in the present state of public affairs! He farther told them, they were engaged in a war against an enemy who denied the existence of a Being, and who acknowledged nothing either divine or human. The phraseology was very strange. Mr. Sheridan supposed, however, that he meant the French were a nation of Atheists. Supposing even they were, he by no means conceived this operated as an apology for the unexampled prodigality with which the war was connected; on the contrary, he believed an Atheist might be shot at as little expense as a Christian. After adverting to Mr. Dent's speech in a strain of pleasantry, Mr. Sheridan professed his satisfaction in agreeing with most of the observations of the gentleman to whom he had given way. There certainly was no moment in which the British house of commons had been more powerfully called upon to renounce all dependence on ministers, and to repose confidence in themselves, and he was happy to see this laudable independence manifesting itself in the speeches of this evening. In the last speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, upon which he meant to make a few remarks, the right honorable gentleman had availed himself of the Speaker's indulgence, and of the forms of the house, by which the opener of

a debate was permitted to conclude it. He had no doubt in making that speech he wished to conclude the debate; it by no means followed, however, because he had spoken a second time the debate should be concluded. As gentlemen were allowed, however, in special circumstances to speak twice in the course of one debate, he was aware the right honorable gentleman had not violated the rules of the house, for there was no person who would not agree that the circumstances in which he spoke were very particular, the more so, as he was left by his friends to have the sole conduct of his own defence. The speech, he owned, was a very strong one. It had been remarked that persons were sometimes deprived of their intellects by severe distress, and from the tenor of his argument, he was also led to conclude that the embarrassments of his situation had produced that effect upon the right honorable gentleman. In one part of his argument he advanced the absurd position, that were government to discharge all the debts they owed to the Bank, as the payment would be made good in paper, it would not relieve that public body from the difficulties produced by their present want of cash. But was any man so ignorant as not to know the deficiency arose not merely from the positive want of cash, but from the comparative quantity of paper which they had issued, and the demands of which they had not cash enough to answer? Of course, when this paper was returned to them, they would find themselves at liberty, with safety to themselves, to issue a greater proportion of their specie. For instance, supposing the Bank of England to have issued ten millions in paper, by way of loan, and to be possessed of one million in cash, as a sum sufficient to answer the demand, certainly if five millions of this loan were paid them, they might issue five hundred thousand pounds out of the million of specie, because the run upon their cash

would, in that case, be diminished precisely half. The right honorable gentleman had alledged that the dividends on stock were always paid in notes. But were the notes the same before, that they are now?—Was not the question always put to the creditor whether he would take his dividend in paper or in cash? And when it was put in his choice, he took it in paper, because he might have had cash if he pleased. With respect to the effect of the measure upon the Bank credit, it certainly had inflicted upon it a very severe stroke, and he saw only one way in which it could possibly recover it, which was by the Bank coming forward, and shewing the country they had adopted the measure from compulsion. An honorable gentleman (Mr. Bastard) had urged in very proper and becoming language, the necessity of cutting off every thing superfluous; he was not of a sanguinary disposition; but when he saw a person presiding in one of the principal departments of public affairs, and ruining the country by his measures, he was at a loss to know what ought to be cut off first; but he was convinced some example ought to be made for the instruction of both the present and of future times. An honorable baronet (Sir William Pulteney) observed, that if the measure was repeated, it would make but a bad joke. If it was a joke, it certainly was one at which the country was not much disposed to laugh; but if it was tolerated in this instance, he was afraid that these facetious measures would frequently occur. What then was to be done in order to prevent them from ever again recurring? An honorable gentleman (Mr. Hussey) had said, that to retrieve the credit of the Bank, government had only to discharge the sums advanced them by the Bank; but he would add, it was necessary also that government should pay all their creditors as well as the Bank—they should pay the civil list—they should pay the half-pay officers, who were now almost starving—

that they should pay their agents and their contractors. Mr. Sheridan conceived it was by no means a temporary expedient; but he foresaw that the Bank never would be able afterwards to defray its outstanding engagements in cash. For how was it possible they could, since they were about to issue a greater quantity of paper, and their cash was seized upon for the public service? The hon. baronet who advanced a contrary opinion, and who knew more about business than most gentlemen of equal property, had too much good sense not to acknowledge the error on which it was founded. Mr. Sheridan next reprobated the transaction as a step to associate the bankrupt government with the solvent bank; a partnership, which, if the Bank directors knew the interest of the concern under their direction, they ought to spurn, and to force the right honorable gentleman to withdraw his indorsements from their bills. But it was urged, the Bank had temporary difficulties to encounter, and it behoved them to adopt some mode of granting relief to that important public body. The house of commons, however, knew nothing of this; no application had been made for the order in council; on the contrary, it appeared that this facetious council, instead of examining the directors of the Bank, acted entirely upon the authority of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Nay, what added to his surprise was, that not one of the Bank directors who had seats in that house had ever come forward and expressed an opinion upon the subject. Some information was certainly necessary before the house sanctioned so novel and dangerous a measure. They had heard of the Bank a short time ago lending two millions to government; and they had also heard of the dividends on bank stock increasing. Was it not material to be informed, therefore, how they had come to stop payment at a time when their affairs seemed to be going on so prosperously? Perhaps the directors might be to

blame; he did not say it was so, but the house ought to be satisfied that it was not so. They were not even apprised whether it was the wish of the Bank that the measure should be adopted. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said it was, but he took nothing upon his word, and therefore, called upon some of the directors of the Bank to come forward and say whether it was or was not at their desire the order in council had been issued. There was something unaccountable on the face of the business, for the Bank to announce its own solvency immediately after it had been ordered to stop payment; and if it was solvent, why was an order issued which would operate so much to the injury of their credit? For his own part he did not approve of opening a committee to inquire into the affairs of the Bank, because he had the firmest confidence in its solidity, and such an inquiry might considerably hurt its credit; but he deemed it highly expedient that a committee should be appointed to inquire into the grounds upon which the order in council had been issued. He was of opinion, at all events, the two inquiries ought not to be separated. An instruction, if necessary, might be given to the committee, to report upon the circumstances of the Bank before it entered upon the other inquiry. But he did not perceive so much dispatch was requisite, because the proclamation, at present, had all the effect of a law, and a bill might be immediately passed as a matter of temporary accommodation, to enable the Bank to issue small notes. So far, however, as he had made up his opinion, he disapproved of a committee to inquire into the circumstances of the Bank, as such an inquiry might be productive of evil, and could not possibly do any good. For what was the result expected to be? There was but one hope, and one opinion, that the Bank would be found to be perfectly secure. Why then should the public guarantee their notes? As well might the

master of the mint indorse a guinea. But what was the nature of this guarantee which government so generously offered to the Bank? Government first lays hands on the cash of the Bank. Next day government says, you cannot pay your notes; no, replies the Bank, because you have taken away our cash; very well, then, say government, you must stop payment till we examine into your affairs, form a partnership, and indorse your bills. The Bank might very justly answer; give us back our cash, and we neither want your partnership nor your guarantee. Had such a man as Sir John Barnard presided at the Bank, he would have taken the order of council and thrown it in the face of the messenger, for in either case it was an affront upon that body. If they had cash, what right had the Chancellor of the Exchequer to seize upon it; if they had none, it was an insult to pretend to prohibit them from issuing it. And what was the value of this guarantee, which government was so generous as to offer to the Bank? Had not government broken its faith with all its creditors, with the Bank, with the Emperor of Germany, and with every individual who were in possession of its acceptances? The solidity of the Bank would be infinitely stronger, if it remained entirely unconnected with so discreditable a partner. Mr. Sheridan then suggested the steps which, in his opinion, ought to be taken, if the difficulties really existed. Bank-notes ought to be made a legal tender to government, and government ought to be compelled to make every payment in bank-notes, except the dividends on the public stock, which ought to be paid in cash. He was unfriendly to a committee to inquire into the situation of the Bank, but, instead of opposing it, he would move an amendment, that these words be inserted into the original motion after "this house," "And also to inquire into the causes which have produced this order in council, and the grounds of providing for the order in council, dated the 26th of February,

providing for the confirmation and continuance of measures contained in said order."

The house divided upon the amendment ; ayes 11 ; noes 241.

MARCH 1.

STOPPAGE OF CASH PAYMENTS AT THE BANK.

Mr. Wilberforce Bird moved for leave to bring in a bill to suspend, for a time limited, the operations of two acts, (prohibiting the issuing of any promissory note for less than twenty shillings, payable any otherwise than upon demand, &c.) as far as related to bankers not residing in the Cities of London and Westminster, and the Borough of Southwark.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he deplored the necessity to which we were now driven upon the subject of specie all over this kingdom. The remedy now proposed he feared and believed to be absolutely necessary. It would undoubtedly be a great evil ; yet if omitted, a greater evil might ensue ; and when two evils presented themselves to view, it was of course proper to chuse the lesser ; and, therefore, according to the idea he had upon the subject, not pretending to be thoroughly well acquainted with it, he thought that the remedy which was now proposed must be adopted. But he could not help saying a few words upon this matter, because it appeared to him to be of vast importance. The honorable gentleman said, that the manufacturers and bankers in the country were well known in the neighbourhood in which they live, and therefore there could be no inconvenience in this measure with regard to the payment of the notes as they became due ; but he thought the case was otherwise with regard to the capital, and therefore London, Westminster, and Southwark, were to be omitted in the bills, according to the honorable gentleman's intention at present. That there might be great difficulty and inconvenience in the extension of the bill, he had no doubt ; for, most unhappily for this country, there

must be great difficulty and inconvenience in the whole progress, and in every branch of this subject ; but he did not know how it was possible to go on without making some provision in this respect for the capital as well as for the country ; and here he hardly knew what to say ; he was confounded when he looked at the probable consequences to which the measure which gave birth to these applications might lead. He knew not what provision was made, or could be made, for the payment of workmen, manufacturers, tradesmen or others, even for next Saturday night. He was sure, that if any measure was to be adopted upon the subject, not a moment ought to be lost. If a poor man was to be paid by a guinea note instead of a guinea, and no man would give him change for it without a discount of seven shillings, to what dreadful consequences might this not lead ? What would a poor man do with his fourteen shillings instead of his guinea ? What would the still poorer man do, whose whole weekly wages amounted to no more than fourteen shillings ? and, he believed, the average price of weekly labour was not higher. Indeed he apprehended the most dreadful consequence would soon ensue from these things ; nor did he know how the evil was to be averted. He mentioned these things, that every man in the house should instantly turn his thoughts to the subject. It would be dreadful, indeed, if these notes, instead of money, should become *assignats* ; and he feared it would be so.

Mr. Pitt thought the effects of the suspension might be beneficial to London, Westminster, and Southwark. He should therefore wish for leave to bring in the bill that it should be larger than the motion asked ; and therefore moved, as an amendment, "That the exception should be left out." This was assented to.

Mr. Fox moved—"That a committee be appointed to inquire into the causes which have produced the order of council." Mr. Pitt said he objected to the appointment of a committee as now proposed ; but not to the inquiry, or to its being conducted by the committee now appointed.

Mr. Sheridan said, that the mode of inquiry

which the Chancellor of the Exchequer now proposed, was precisely that which was suggested by the amendment which he had moved, and which was rejected last night. The right honorable gentleman had asserted the dignity of the house with much warmth; and here he was permitted to retort upon him; but his speech was so barren of argument, that it need only be repeated to appear ridiculous. Mr. Sheridan admitted that the mode of appointing committees by ballot was a good one at first, but it was now become one of those good rules and good practices, which are so often converted into masks of imposture and abuse. The right honorable gentleman affected to treat a public canvas for a committee as absurd and indecent. But he might have recollected, that he himself had recourse to that absurd and indecent mode of appointing a committee at a very critical period (the time of the regency). He would now ask him, why at that time he gave into such absurdity, and induced the house to act in a manner so unbecoming its dignity? It was because at that time he knew the case to be delicate and nice, and that the country would not have been satisfied with a balloted committee, which they knew to be a jury packed by ministers, to serve the purposes which they had in view. The right honorable gentleman asked, why they could object to a committee whose names they did not know? What could the right honorable gentleman say, if he should assert that their names were known, and that several members, who got treasury lists put into their hands at the door of the house, went away in disgust. He could not be permitted, by the forms of the house, positively to say who would be on the list of the committee, but he should merely mention who, in his opinion, would be proper persons, and whose names, he would venture to predict, would appear on the list to be given in the course of an hour. If, however, that list agreed with his prediction, he presumed it

would hardly be contended that he was such a prophet as to be able to tell the chances of a fair ballot. The names were very respectable, and it was necessary that they should be so, in order to give a colour to the business. Mr. Sheridan then read the names on his list as follows :—

Sir John Scott, a very respectable name.

Isaac Hawkins Browne, Esq.—a very proper person.

Charles Bragge, Esq.—He will entertain the committee with critical remarks.

John William Anderson, Esq.

John Pane, Esq.

Thomas Grenville, Esq.

William Wilberforce, Esq.

Charles Grey, Esq.—very proper indeed.

Sir John Mitford.

William Hussey, Esq.

W. Wilberforce Bird, Esq.

William Plumer, Esq.

Thomas Powys, Esq.

John Blackburne, Esq.

Thomas Berney Bramston, Esq.

All very respectable gentlemen!

He must observe, however, that in this list ministers had not preserved the rules of proportion, for his side of the house were entitled to have five and a fraction. He did not charge the Chancellor of the Exchequer with making out the list himself. Here, said Mr. Sheridan, I see the right honorable gentleman opposite (Mr. Dundas) smile, as if he would say, “No, my right honorable friend, in the innocence of his heart, never suspected such a thing; but there are plenty around perfectly competent to the task.” With respect to the question itself, he was perfectly indifferent whether an inquiry was instituted or not, if another committee was not appointed. An honorable General had endeavoured to account for the Secretary at War not signing the order of council; he believed that it proceeded from

the reflections it contained against the alarmists; for he was so rooted an alarmist himself, that he was sure he could not believe that any of his tribe could act in a manner worthy of reprehension. He begged pardon of the house for being jocular on so grave a subject; but even amidst the wreck of public credit, and on the brink of the country's ruin, it was impossible not to laugh at the juggling tricks and miserable shifts to which ministers had recourse to screen themselves from punishment.

The house divided; for the motion 67; against it 141.

Mr. Sheridan then moved,—“That Mr. Fox be added to the committee on the affairs of the Bank, &c.”

The house divided; ayes 53; noes 144.

MARCH 3.

STOPPAGE OF CASH PAYMENTS AT THE BANK.

A clause was brought up by Mr. Bird, which he was desirous should be inserted in the bill, viz. “That if any person should fail in the payment of a note three days after it became due, that it should be lawful for the justices to summon him before them, to award costs to the plaintiff, with the payment of the amount of the note, and to levy distress upon the effects of the person so failing in his engagement.”

MR. SHERIDAN stated this was as important a subject as could possibly engage the attention of the house in the present unfortunate situation of the country. One unfortunate consequence would follow from the issue of those bills, that if any should not be paid, a general distrust would take place with respect to their validity, and the whole would undergo a most alarming depreciation. At the same time it would be a most unfortunate thing to hold out to all the manufacturers in the kingdom, a menace of being imprisoned or sent to the house of correction, if not from any fraudulent purpose, but from the failure of remittances, or the pressure of the times, they should be unable to make good their engagement. If the bill was accompanied

with such a menace, instead of having the effect to afford a temporary relief to their credit, it would tempt them rather to incur the evils of immediate bankruptcy, than run the risk of being subjected to a punishment so painful and degrading. At the same time, if these bills were to rest merely on nominal credit, they would not answer the purpose to afford relief to the laborious poor. If presented to the baker and butcher, they would not be accepted by them to their full amount, and this circumstance must also tend to create a general depreciation.— He should, therefore, propose, in order to remedy this evil, that the persons issuing those notes, as a security for their payment, should previously deposit property adequate to the amount of the notes issued, and that no individuals should be allowed to issue those notes, whose substance did not allow them to make this deposit. This precaution, he remarked, would remove every chance for fraud or depreciation, which must otherwise inevitably take place in the circulation of this paper. If manufacturers were in such a situation as to justify them in issuing those notes, they must either be on such a footing of credit with their banker, or in possession of good bills, which would enable them to produce security to the amount of the notes issued. He illustrated his proposition by referring to the instance of lottery tickets. The dealers in those tickets were allowed to divide them in small shares for the accommodation of their customers, after having deposited the original tickets as a security. He then gave notice of his intention to move that evening for an immediate supply of copper coinage in pennies and two-pennies, for the relief of the laborious poor. He should not move for any fresh coinage of halfpence, as, if these were of the proper standard, they must tend to cut out all those which were now in circulation; an evil which might be of greater magnitude than the relief it was intended to afford. He could not con-

fide for a moment in the diligence of ministers; else, when they foresaw, as they must necessarily have done, the approach of this great public calamity, they would have taken measures to have had by this time waggon loads of this useful coin coming up from Bolton's manufactory at Birmingham.

The clause after some further discussion went through the committee, in which a penalty that a magistrate might inflict was limited to the sum of twenty shillings: and being reported, it was added to the bill by way of rider.

Mr. Sheridan then moved, "That an humble address be presented to His Majesty, that he will be graciously pleased to give directions that measures may be taken for procuring an immediate supply of such copper coinage as may be best adapted to the payment of the laborious poor in the present exigency."

Ordered.

THANKS TO ADMIRAL SIR JOHN JERVIS.

Mr. Dundas moved, "That the thanks of this house to be given to Admiral Sir John Jervis, Knight of the most Honorable Order of the Bath, for his able and gallant conduct in the most brilliant and decisive victory obtained over the Spanish fleet, on the 14th day of February last, by the fleet under his command."

Mr. Keene did not consider this motion sufficient, and, therefore, moved, in addition to it, "That an humble address be presented to His Majesty, that His Majesty would be graciously pleased to confer some signal mark of his royal favor on Admiral Sir John Jervis, for his gallant and meritorious exertions on the 14th of February, &c."

Mr. Sheridan.—It is impossible but that every man must feel the sentiment that every thing that can be done by this house ought to be done in the present instance to express our high sense of the distinguished merit and eminent services of the gallant Admiral. I differ, however, from the honorable mover of the resolution, who has stated, that for the sake of Sir John Jervis, he is, at all events, desirous that it should appear on the Journals of this house. If the motion be put and opposed, to insert it on the Journals of this house, instead of adding to the well-earned reputation of that brave

officer, would, I conceive, have a contrary effect. The Journals of this house do not contain the records of that brave officer's glory. They would only bear testimony to the rejection of the motion. I cannot, however, submit to the doctrine that this house have no right to interfere to express their marked approbation of a distinguished character, or to apply to His Majesty to signalize the most eminent public services by a peculiar mark of his royal favor. If there was any chance that the present motion would be passed unanimously, it would experience my warmest approbation. I cannot allow the proud boast of the right honorable gentleman to pass unnoticed, that in no instance has there appeared on the part of the executive government any degree of insensibility to the worth of gallant officers, or any want of promptitude to reward the claims of public services. The very mention of the name of the honorable Admiral must forcibly recal the recollection of the former services, and the degree of attention which they experienced from the executive government. No mark of honor—no testimony of reward has hitherto followed from his gallant exertions, which ministers feel themselves compelled to notice in terms of the highest panegyric. While they have withheld from him, and other illustrious characters, the just reward of their merit, on whom have they chosen to throw away their honors? On persons, who have no pretensions to professional desert, who can exhibit no claims of public service. The late instances of individuals, on whom, for no reason whatever that could justify any addition of dignity in the eyes of the nation, the distinction of the peerage has been conferred, undoubtedly tend to cheapen the honor, and to take away from it all idea of reward for public services. If any honor could be conferred on the gallant Admiral in a way so marked as to separate it from the mass of honors which have been lavished on others, it would undoubtedly only

be a just tribute for his distinguished services. I conceive that I am fully borne out by facts, when I aver, that honors have not lately been conferred in a manner agreeable to the public voice or the public wishes. I need only allude to the instance of a noble Lord (Howe) who, by his gallant and able conduct, had formed the strongest claims upon the gratitude and justice of his country. A blue riband was then vacant. It was pointed out for the noble Lord by public expectation and public rumour. The noble Lord could certainly feel no desire for such a distinction from any motive of personal vanity: but it was natural he should wish for the dignity of the service to which he belonged, that it should experience the most distinguished marks of the royal approbation. But instead of the blue riband being given to the gallant and venerable Admiral, he was offered a paltry bauble, which he properly rejected, while this signal honor, which ought only to be accorded to the highest merit, was jirked on the shoulders of a person, for what claims of public service, I confess, I not know, and I am disposed to think that the country must be equally at a loss to discover.

Mr. Keene, in compliance with the wish of a great majority in the house, withdrew his motion. Mr. Dundas's was carried nem. con.

MARCH 9.

STOPPAGE OF CASH PAYMENTS AT THE BANK.

Mr. SHERIDAN begged leave to offer a few observations upon the reports of the Committee of Secresy, as they were materially connected with the business of the day, and afterwards suggest such a proposition as the nature of the circumstances seemed to require. The first measure which he thought necessary to adopt was, to endeavour to prevent the impression which the report of the Committee of Secresy might have upon the public opi-

nion respecting the situation of the Bank, because, according to the report of the committee, the government was represented as a debtor to the Bank in various sums, independent of eleven millions which the Committee reckoned as forming so much of the capital stock of the Bank, when, in fact, that sum of eleven millions was no debt at all; and a declaration of such a nature was entirely calculated to mislead. Instead of being included in the capital stock of the Bank as a debt, it should have been reckoned, what it really is, an annuity of 350,000*l.* per annum, that being the stipulated interest for the sum during a certain period of years. If the eleven millions were actually belonging to the effects of the Bank, and available at any time, and for any purpose, that sum might be made applicable in any exigency to discharge any demand which might occur; but that could not be called a debt where there were no means of claiming the sum so reckoned. Government might pay off that sum if they were so inclined, it is true; but it was improbable that it would do so; nor was it at present very probable that government would pay it off in 1814, that being the expiration of the eighteen years for which it was obtained, when it could retain the use of it for so small an interest as three per cent. There was no power in the Bank to compel the payment of this money at any period, and the payment of it rested solely on the option of the government. The Bank, as a corporation, was merely a vehicle for managing the national debt; and so long as the national debt existed, the Bank would exist also; it would be a corporation to the end of time. He wished, indeed, it might not be so; but he repeated it would be a corporation to the end of time, if the national debt remained unpaid. So far, then, it was evident, that eleven millions did not form a part of the capital stock of the Bank, but only gave it an annuity; and this was an instance, he would not say of the inaccuracy or deliberate intention to misre-

present of the committee, but of a statement, in consequence of which a sort of impression had gone abroad, as if that money were immediately applicable to any object of national relief. The inquiry then would be, of what effects the seventeen millions are composed which are to defray the outstanding engagements of the Bank; they consist, of course, of cash in hand, of other disposeable securities, and of bills which the Bank has discounted. If part of the assets, then, consist in bills which have been discounted, the motion of his honorable friend (Mr. Tierney) was proper, in desiring to know the increase or decrease of those discounts? for if the Bank were to continue to issue fresh discounts, whatever might have been the incredible distress of individuals, according to the honorable baronet (Sir Benjamin Hammet), after it had refused to pay its own notes, although he did not wish to give his opinion of the propriety of extending its discounts, he was obliged to say, that the distress of individuals was the only excuse for such a measure. He now came to examine the situation of the Bank in respect to government. It appeared by the paper on the table, that government owed 9,964,000*l.* to the Bank, which remained as part of their assets, and the permanent securities for defraying the 13,770,000*l.* of outstanding demands upon it. Now, what had been the conduct of government in this affair, but the most extraordinary that ever occurred? By parity of reasoning, let any gentleman take a supposable case of individuals acting in the same way, and see how it would stand.—If a merchant, for instance, had assets in bonds, merchandize, discounts, and other disposeable commodities, to the value of 17,000*l.* out of which he owed to various creditors 13,000*l.*, but had, on the per contra side of his account, 10,000*l.* due to him by one man, which was within 3,000*l.* of the extent of his engagements, would not that merchant think it very extraordinary conduct

in that man if he say, "Sir I understand that your affairs are in a ticklish way; let me make an inquiry, and examine them; and if, upon a strict examination, I discover that you have wherewithal in due time to extricate yourself from your difficulties, and discharge your debts, I will not say that I may not guarantee them for you." Yet, however, extraordinary such a mode of proceeding might appear, such had actually been the mode of proceeding between the government and the Bank. To go back to the comparison—the gentleman would say, "Why do you not pay me the money you owe me before you make such a request, and then I may be able to satisfy every demand without your interference."—Such should have been the conduct of the directors of the Bank upon the present occasion. He would not say, that the government had not been highly criminal; and that the directors of the Bank had not committed great errors. He might be blamed at such a crisis for speaking so plainly; but plain dealing was now the only method to recover public credit. The next inquiry was, whether the Bank had declined all at once, or suffered a gradual decrease; and if the latter were the case, how happened it that the fatal effects which ensued were not foreseen, nor measures taken to prevent them. About four years ago, the Bank increased their dividend to seven per cent. which indicated a growing prosperity; and granting that to be case, could they have declined all at once? Was the house and the public to imagine, when the Bank undertook to subscribe one million last year towards the loyalty loan of eighteen millions, that they were then suffering a gradual decrease? because if they were, how happened it that government did not take one measure to pay the debt, or any part of it, which it owed to the Bank, to prevent the inconveniences which it has lately been subjected to, but on the contrary, took an additional sum of one million? It appeared as if it had al-

most been the desire and plan of government to reduce the Bank to such a situation; and nothing short of infatuation on the part of the Bank could have submitted to such conduct. If the present difficulties were foreseen, why did the government shut the door when the books for the subscription of the loyalty loan of eighteen millions were open, and when people from every part of the kingdom came forward with their money, and were disappointed? Why, instead of closing the account of eighteen millions, did they not extend it to thirty millions, when they found they could raise the money with so little trouble and inconvenience? Did they fear, that by keeping the books open for the receipt of a larger sum than they had originally stated, they should depress the funds. Allowing that the minister did think so, ought he not to have deliberated a little, and have taken some millions more to pay the Bank with a temporary depression of the funds, which would soon have rebounded to their usual standard, than have subjected mercantile men to so much distress and difficulty, by the narrowing of discounts, reduced the Bank to such a deplorable situation, depressed the funds lower than he would have done at that time, and given so severe a shock to public credit? If the minister did not know of the gradual decrease of the prosperity of the Bank, and did not foresee these consequences, he stands excused; but then there will be much blame and error of judgment imputable to the Bank. What then, it might be said, ought not the directors of the Bank to lend assistance to the government, or to individuals, in cases of temporary difficulty, and on permanent securities? Undoubtedly, if they could do so, they ought; but let them first recollect that they are not the trustees of the public, nor of government funds, but the trustees of Bank proprietors, of widows, and of orphans; who, if they were blindly to go on in lending unlimited assistance, must eventually be ruined. Here, then, it might be asked, What mea-

sures did government pursue, to enable the Bank to pay its outstanding engagements? It would naturally be supposed that something was done, besides the prohibition of paying in specie. It does not appear, however, that any thing was done to avoid the measures which government adopted. Had the Bank not the means to shun the calamity? Certainly they had, for their sufficiency has been declared. Did the Bank call in any of the debts which were due to them? Did it narrow its discounts? or did it dispose of any of its disposable effects? One of these, if not all, would have been the plan of a merchant to retrieve himself in a similar situation; and yet not one of these measures did the Bank adopt. Why did they not sell the loyalty loan? If they had sold it, they might have sold it with a loss to themselves, 'tis true; but do not most men in embarrassed situations, if they dispose of their disposable effects with loss to satisfy their creditors, suffer the loss themselves? The Bank Trustees were bound to do justice to their creditors, to their trust, and to themselves; and it was extraordinary to see wise and just men like them brought to such a situation. Upon these grounds, therefore, he thought it his duty to give notice, that he should to-morrow move that immediate steps be taken to pay the money advanced by the Directors of the Bank to government.

Mr. Pitt moved, "That the chairman be intrusted to move for leave to bring in a bill to conform and continue the order in council of the 26th of February, for a time to be limited."

Mr. Sheridan said, that if he had not known the minister pretty well, and that he knew that many of his adherents carried their system much farther than their leader, he should have been more astonished at the present plan than he was, even desperate as that plan was; for if the speeches of the noble Lord (Hawkesbury), and the learned gentleman (Solicitor-General) who had just spoken, had conveyed the sentiments of the minister, and if we were

to follow them, then, indeed, there could be nothing so desperate as the situation to which we are reduced, in reasoning as well as in finance. According to one of those orators, a forced paper currency was better than specie, and our commerce will increase greatly in proportion as we violate the principles of honesty in paying our public debts. He thought that paper was only a good thing while we had the means of converting it into cash; but the noble lord thought it not only a cleaner, neater, and more portable and convenient medium to represent property; but it was the very essence of wealth itself, even when it could not be converted into specie, and that the flourishing state of our commerce was the cause of this inability to produce specie to answer demands upon the Bank of England; why, really, until he heard such nonsense, he could not possibly have concluded that any such would have been uttered in that house. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, although he could not countenance, had given birth to this kind of reasoning; and he wished for his convenience he could carry it into practice. What a pleasant thing it would be, to be able to shew from day to day, that the inability of the government to discharge the demands that were made upon it, was owing to the enormous increase of its wealth! What an entertainment it would be to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to sit in his office, and to receive all collectors of the revenue in all its branches, of customs, excise, and all the other taxes of this country, who should tell him they had all been out, and had done their duty most diligently, but that the capital of every man on whom they intended to levy taxes, was so enormously increased that they were not any of them enabled to pay a single shilling! and yet such arguments from the collector of taxes could not be more absurd than the arguments that had been urged to-night. The evil which was now the subject of complaint, had been apprehended to arise from one of the

two causes ; perhaps from both. The one was, that enormous sums of money had been sent abroad ; the other, that men had been alarmed, and had locked up vast quantities of specie in their coffers ; and for this evil, it was supposed, to issue an enormous quantity of paper would be a remedy. Those who thought so, he would venture to say, did not understand the nature of the evil.

The learned gentleman had entered into the nature of the constitution of the Bank. He told gentlemen opposite to him, that they were extremely ignorant of the nature of the constitution of the Bank ; he told them, that they mistook the meaning of the act of the fifth of King William, and that that act did not constitute the charter of the Bank for the private purposes of paying its creditors, but for the public purpose of assisting government ; and that, if they did not answer this original and public purpose, the same power which created might also destroy them—a pretty good threat, and a little more intelligible than had ever before been given them. Now, that very *learned* gentleman who has accused others of being ignorant of the constitution of the Bank, had not, he was convinced he had not, read one syllable of the constitution of the Bank ; for if he had, he could not have uttered such gross and palpable absurdities about it. The Bank instituted to accommodate government ! No such thing, nor any thing like it. They lent the money to which the learned gentleman alluded, and which was now said to have accumulated to eleven millions, for a particular advantage which they purchased by so lending ; but so far was it from being considered at that time, that it was to be the duty of the Bank to lend money to government in future, whenever government might apply for it, or when government might want it, that the very act of parliament expressed an apprehension of evil effects from too great a facility in lending money from the Bank to government, and therefore provided against it ; and therefore the

act expressed, that no money should be advanced by the Bank to government, except sums that shall have been previously voted by parliament, and this was prohibited under a penalty of treble the sum advanced to be forfeited by the directors who should so advance it ; so that this act, by which their constitution was created, had it in view that the Bank should never become what the present government had endeavoured to make them, too successfully, the mere tools and engines of the King's ministers. And here it was impossible for him to abstain from adverting to the manner in which the provisions of this salutary act have been got rid of. This being the law of the land, the Bank directors would be bound to observe it ; but at the commencement of the war, a bill was brought in to do away the effect of the act altogether ; not, indeed, under that title, nor was there any notice of such intention, but a clause was smuggled into an act of parliament, avowedly brought in for another purpose, by which clause that provision in the act of King William, which prohibited the Bank making any advances to government, upon any but sums expressly voted by parliament, was repealed. The directors had before that time advanced money to government against law, they were indemnified for that illegal act, and were enabled to do so hereafter, for that wholesome provision of the act of King William, by which they were forbidden to do it, was now repealed. That repeal was the cause of our present calamity. Immediately after this, one million five hundred thousand pounds was advanced by the Bank to government, and was paid into the Treasury ; and now the house would consider how well the learned gentleman, who had accused others of ignorance of the original constitution of the Bank of England, himself understood that original constitution. But here again he must clear himself from any imputation of having said any thing against the insolvency of the Bank. He

blamed the Bank for the servility with which they obeyed the illegal order in council. How far that order would hereafter turn out to be wise, was another question. He said nothing against the accommodation which the Bank had given to the public; on the contrary, he believed that their discounts had been of service to commerce at large. His observation was this: that if they knew their former discounts would not be good unless they continued to discount, the bills which they had already discounted could not be taken as assets in their hands to the full amount of such discounts; and therefore the committee was not justified in considering such bills as assets in the hands of the Bank to their full amount. Gentlemen misunderstood him, for he did not mean to say the Bank was insolvent; he only found fault with the manner in which this matter was stated. He did not blame the committee for this; it was a mere oversight for which they were excusable; no man would suppose that he should be eager to blame a report which was the unanimous opinion of a committee, when one of its members (Mr. Grey) was a person for whom he had so much esteem, and who, he knew, would never spare himself any trouble while he had a hope that his exertions would be serviceable to the public; but his duty demanded of him these observations; for this report, unless understood as he had stated it, would mislead the public as to the real assets in the hands of the Bank.

With regard to the debt of eleven millions from government to the Bank, the learned gentleman had made an enormous calculation of its value; he had stated it to be worth for sale near sixteen millions. It was no such thing, unless government choosed to make them a present of it; it was only an annuity of three hundred and thirty thousand a year, no part of the capital of which could the Bank be entitled to from government for sixteen years. In this interval they could have only three hundred and thirty

thousand pounds a year. There was also a statement in the report, which, if not looked into, would mislead the public. So far was there from being eleven millions as assets this day in the hands of the Bank, it would not amount to six millions; but this was only an observation on the mistaken description of the assets in the hands of the Bank, in which the report described that to be five, and the learned gentleman about ten millions more than it was worth. This mistake of the committee arose from not specifying the nature of the debt from government to the Bank; and the mistake of the learned gentleman arose from not recollecting, that, in this, Bank stock 4 per cent. dividend had been added to the original 3 per cent. interest.

But it seemed, from the observations of the learned gentleman, that the holders of Bank notes are not the only creditors of the public; there are others whose claims are of superior exigency—the army and the navy. That soldiers, coming from barracks where they can learn no sympathy with the public in any calamity with arms in their hands, and who have to deal with a government whose system they know to be terror, should be duns, and pretty successful duns, he was ready to admit; but that their claims upon the Bank of England for specie was superior to the proprietors of stock, or the holders of Bank paper, was a proposition which he begged leave to deny; nor did it appear that the Bank thought so previous to the issuing of this order in council. He apprehended that the first duty of the Bank was to keep faith with its own creditors, for that was the way for them to fulfil the trust that was reposed in them, and a deviation from which was a public breach of faith. But it seemed they were in no case to refuse to accommodate the public by aiding government. They had never done so; and if they should, they forfeited their charter. How stood that fact? Did they not actually refuse, in the year 1783, in an instalment upon the loan, by which

refusal stocks fell 11 or 15 per cent.? but no man told them then, that for that refusal they should have their charter wrested out of their hands. The question was, whether the Bank had not exceeded their duty upon this occasion? and that was a question which the house should have clearly stated before them on the face of the transaction, to form a clear judgment upon it. There was an assertion of the minister, that this proceeding was necessary, but there was no evidence of that necessity; and how could the house proceed to give a legislative sanction to a measure, of the necessity of which there was no proof before them? It was stated, that if government were to pay the Bank five millions tomorrow, it would not relieve them from the present pressure. Why not? Could they not purchase bullion with it? Really this mode of stating difficulties he did not understand: but this was a system fraught with the most dreadful evils; it was of the same complexion as that which laid the foundation of the ruin of the French finances, and led to all the horrors which have been so much deplored in that country. The measure of the act in council to stop the payment of the Bank, was as violent as if it had been directed to any banker or private individual to lay hold of the cash in his coffers, and rob him of it, under the pretence that it was intended for the public use. The minister told us, the committee had not reported enough upon this subject. He agreed with him they had not; there needed no ghost to come from the grave to tell what we all knew already; and certainly they had told nothing which we did not all know already. But he did not see that ministers had laid before the house any ground for a bill; what need had they of a bill, while it was notorious they would proceed without it, and as notorious, that the Bank would obey them? If they acted illegally, he thought they ought to be left to their peril; there was no reason why the house should aid them, since they did not conde-

scend to give any proof of the necessity of their conduct. They had shewn they could commit robbery; and as they did not offer any evidence of the necessity of any one thing, why should the house give them leave to bring in a bill to indemnify themselves? They ought, in his opinion, to be left to themselves, to go on in their own way, without the sanction of parliament. He warned the house of the effect of giving to ministers this facility of breaking the public faith; it would only encourage them to treat all ideas of responsibility with contempt; and there was no possibility of knowing where their desperation would end. He believed that we should not long be able, after the inundation of paper to which this system gave birth, to stop them from making Bank notes legal tender, and then adieu to the appearance of specie at the Bank, and soon afterwards to the real value of the Bank note. These ideas pressed very much upon his mind; but as he always wished to give way to the opinion of his right honorable friend (Mr. Fox), who thought it proper that leave should be given to bring in this bill, he should not divide the house upon the present question; but in the stages of this proceeding he should have motions that should go with it *pari passu*.

The motion was carried without a division.

Mr. Sheridan then renewed the motion which he had made before, that the right honorable Charles James Fox be added to the committee. He did it, he said, from the persuasion that his unparalleled talents and established integrity would point him out to all England as the man to whom an inquiry so important ought to be committed. He was sure that, if the Bank themselves had the nomination, they would be eager to enrol his name in the list, that they might give character and credit to the report.

The committee divided; ayes 60; noes 157.

MARCH 10.

PUBLIC DEBTS.

Mr. Pitt moved, "That it be referred to a secret committee, to examine into the total amount of the public debt, with the interest due thereon, and all public charges, as they stood on the 5th of January, 1797; distinguishing what part arose since the year 1793, and the produce of the four years preceding; and also the produce of the several taxes imposed for defraying the charges of each year within the several periods, and to report the same with their opinion thereon to the house. And likewise to examine into, and state the amount of any unfunded debt outstanding on the 5th of January, 1797; and also to calculate the total amount of the expenses incurred for the year 1798, as far as they can be made up, and to state the same, as it shall appear to them, and to the house, together with the provisions that have been made for defraying the same."

The motion was put and carried.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer then moved, "That the said committee be chosen by way of ballot."

Mr. SHERIDAN said, after what had already passed upon the subject of committees, he was surprised the minister should persevere in having a committee appointed by ballot. He hoped it was entirely unnecessary for him to say that neither himself, nor any of his honorable friends, intended to offer any disrespectful expression to any member of the last committee which was chosen by ballot; no such thing was intended. But the fact that a ballot was the means of the minister packing his friends together to make a report upon his conduct, was too notorious to the whole country. A member had openly said the other day, when a list was put into his hand, "this is the house list." Every body understood perfectly what was meant by that; there was no possibility of explaining it away. This was the minister's practice to screen himself; it was a breach of privilege of that house. That this was notorious would appear from a fact which happened in the course of the debate on a former night. Before the names of the committee were brought in and read to the house, he knew the members who would be chosen, for he read the

whole list himself to the house, as a part of his speech, by way of anticipation of the result of the ballot; and they were chosen exactly as he had read them. Was not this a notorious fact? It was recorded on the journals of the house. Why, really, after so notorious an instance of packing a committee, it is a little too barefaced a thing to recur to the same means. He could, however, again repeat that he meant no personal disrespect to any individual of the fifteen gentlemen who composed that committee; but he contended this was not a fair way of appointing them. He must, however, be permitted to say, they did not attend to the subject with the activity which might have been expected of them. They did not meet this morning: how could they discuss the whole of the subject which was now to be submitted to them, without taking into consideration the order in council which had so much conduced to bring about the situation which we are now in? And how could it, in the nature of things, be fair to send to them the consideration of that on which they had already given their judgment? Besides, many of the gentlemen who composed that committee, were gone into the country. Such attempts as these to screen the minister were too gross and palpable, and the whole country had already seen through the artifice. The house, therefore, in defence of its own dignity, ought no longer to be a party to such tricking as this, but should proceed at once to choose a committee openly in the house.

An amendment being moved to insert the word "now,"—The question was put "That the said committee be now chosen by ballot."

Mr. Dundas observed, "he had heard it said, that in choosing a committee by open vote, there was room for influence, and that choosing it by ballot was a cover for rascality." This observation was noticed by Mr. Courtenay.

Mr. Sheridan said, the right honorable gentleman's opinion of a ballot had struck him in the same way as it has done his honorable friend, (Mr.

Courtenay) and he could not account for it in any other manner than as rising out of the late proceedings of the India House, where the right honorable gentleman had been beaten by two ballots, as he conjectured for want of such a list as was made use of in the house of commons. In regard to the counter-list alluded to, he declared his ignorance of it: nor did he take the trouble which his honorable friend had done, of writing any list to throw into the glass, because he was aware he should not carry any member. He was not surprised at the speech of the right honorable gentleman, because there was no hypocrisy in his public character; he had no cant, but always displayed his political profligacy in a bold and honest manner. If a list, however, were necessary, why did they not recommend the names openly? They should recollect, the minister's recommendation was supposed to leave the house scarcely free in its choice; that a ballot was therefore adopted as the most impartial mode of proceeding to destroy that influence; and then, under the mask and cover of a secret list, the minister found means to exercise the same influence in a more delusive and fraudulent manner. To show how this influence operated, he had only to state, that upon the last lists of names the highest number was 143, and the lowest 139, so there were only four gentlemen altered. The right honorable gentleman objected to the amendment, because the house was so thin, and said, would you propose lists now, when so many gentlemen are absent? That is to say, in other words, he was for comparing notes quietly as usual. But surely if the house was competent to the business of referring the propositions to a committee, it was competent to the business of appointing that committee also. The right honorable gentleman had observed, that impurity might be imputed to any gentleman who spoke to his next neighbour about a committee; and appeared very anxious not to be suspected of impu-

rity himself. The right honorable gentleman, it was true, had got out of the cradle and nursery of politics; had got away from school to; had even gone through the political universities, and had since educated a number of young gentlemen in political learning; so that he was not only a "scholar," but a "master of scholars." Indeed, the right honorable gentleman's innocence reminded him of a line in one of Dryden's Plays, where King Arthur falls in love with the appearance of a beautiful young lady, and Merlin the enchanter, coming to remove the spell, exclaims—

"Behold the maiden modesty of Grimbald."

After this play of fancy, Mr. Sheridan proceeded in his argument against the ballot; and alluding to the committee in the lords, which he introduced as a supposeable case in point, reprobated the practice of forcing a man upon a committee appointed to scrutinize his own conduct. With such a committee, he said, whatever might be its report, it would fail in producing the effect intended.

Mr. Pitt called on the clerk to read the proceedings of the house on the 28th of April, 1782; which being read, it appeared that a committee, then sitting on the state of the finances of the country, had come to a resolution, that a secret committee be appointed to inquire into the same, and that this secret committee be chosen by ballot; it was therefore evident, he said, that in cases similar to the present, a secret committee was usually appointed, and that the mode of chusing it was by ballot.

Mr. Sheridan observed, there was a wide difference between the committee then appointed, and that which the house was now about to chuse. The object of the committee alluded to, was to inquire into the conduct of the preceding administration; but the object now to be attained was, an inquiry into the conduct of the administration now actually in power. It was therefore, their interest to endeavour to pack a jury, by whom their own misconduct might be tried and judged.

The house divided on the amendment; ayes 40; noes 123.

STOPPAGE OF CASH PAYMENTS AT THE BANK.

Mr. Sheridan was upon his feet. He said, that the order of council, which required the Bank to stop payment, had not produced that alarm which any man predicting such an event would have imagined. After all the lofty statements of the right honorable gentleman upon the flourishing state of the finances, after the documents by which he had attempted to support them, after the provisions for our expenses which it was said had been made, after the high-coloured contrast which had been drawn between the state of the enemy's finances and our own, and the arguments which had been employed by the right honorable gentleman to shew the fatal consequences of a forced circulation, it could not have been credited that the order would have been attended with so little alarm, and received with so much submission. One great cause of this phenomenon, however, was, that the commercial part of the country derived additional accommodation from the liberality of the Bank in discounts. If, previous to this order, the country was impoverished by the war to a degree that was not fully known, the prevalence of certain opinions upon this subject tended to conceal the reality of our situation. It was, no doubt, true that individuals, possessed of actual property, might be embarrassed for specie, or, what was now fashionably styled, a circulating medium. Such may be the case of the Bank, of the nation itself. This doctrine, however, had been pushed too far: like every other principle, it was only true in the degree; and when carried too far, produced the most mischievous consequences. The minister has laboured to bring the country to think, that the difficulties which they felt were a proof of their prosperity. If the order of council had not been issued, the aspect of affairs to-day, with respect to many individuals, would have been more gloomy than that which it now presents. The minister felt he

was in a situation, that if he insisted on the Bank doing its duty in discharging the just claims of their creditors, and limiting their discounts from the pressure which they felt for cash, numerous and important failures must have taken place throughout the country, and produced a general indisposition to the continuance of the war. On the other hand, he was aware, that if he made no effort to enable the Bank to keep its faith with its creditors, but allowed the circumstances on which the order was founded to come to extremities, he might find a facility in affording a great temporary relief to the difficulties which were experienced. This fact no man could deny. He would ask that respectable class of men, bankers—of which there were many in the house—whether they had not themselves felt a great accommodation from the increased liberality of the Bank in discounts; and whether it did not enable them to give the same accommodation to others? All men engaged in extensive transactions, whether manufactures, a theatre, or any other concern whatever, felt this to be true. This was the true cause of the little dissatisfaction which had been exhibited; but it was likewise a serious symptom of the danger of our situation. It was an opiate, which for a moment removed the sensation, but it increased the cause; it for a time silenced alarm, and lulled asleep apprehension. The house should be jealous, therefore, not only not to deceive the public, but not to deceive themselves; they ought not to be lulled into a false security, nor accept this temporary accommodation as a bribe to reconcile them to the mischiefs with which it was pregnant. He would not assign any particular time for the duration of this order; but he was convinced, that if it continued almost for one month, the situation of this country would be such as to admit of no relief. The breach which credit has sustained, is one which will widen every hour, and which demands the most speedy and effectual remedy. If the evil had arisen

from a scarcity of specie, it was in three ways—by an extraordinary drain, by the balance of exchange, or private hoards. He wished, above all things, the house to cast their eyes about, and see if they could devise any remedy which might supersede the necessity of continuing the order of council by legislative authority. If we were to continue it, necessity would join with habit to reconcile men's minds to it as a permanent system, and things would every hour turn worse, till the possibility of regaining our former stability—of re-establishing credit—was gone for ever. Our situation was either to be retrieved now, or the country was ruined past redemption. He did not consider it much to assume, that a forced circulation of paper would infallibly lead to bankruptcy; for how could you stop when you had begun? With regard to notes being made a legal tender, no satisfaction had been obtained from ministers; and, indeed, if the system was once begun, how was it possible to avoid this measure? But, in pointing out the ruinous consequences to which such a system would tend, it might be answered, that the paper money of this country rests upon a different security from that of the French assignats or mandates, or any other species of paper money in that country; but to this he would reply, that if they both contained the idea of compulsion, this ingredient alone, amid any other differences, would produce a depreciation; and though not in the same rapid progress, the paper of this country would ultimately experience the fate of the French. When depreciation is begun, new issues are made in the same proportion, till absolute ruin ensues. This he was desirous to avoid, if possible, and therefore he was against any legislative authority for the order of council. The house has not yet understood that the measure was absolutely necessary for the Bank. The order of council, indeed, might bear one thing, and mean another. It was stated, however, that the measure was in consequence of public exigen-

cies, and not because the Bank was unable to meet the demands of its creditors. But taking the order as it stood, the cause of making the requisition to the Bank was for the public emergencies. In his opinion the committee in their report seem to have coincided. He had a right to assume, therefore, that it was for the purposes of government, not from the deficiency of the Bank, that the order was issued. The house was called upon by legislative authority to declare, that they preferred the accommodation of government to the just claims of the public creditor. In this view he wished to withhold his assent from such a measure; for if it was passed, he was afraid that the efforts to retrieve our affairs, to re-establish the credit of the Bank, would be greatly relaxed. He wished that even if the order were to continue, that the urgency of the motives to apply a remedy might still be felt; but it may be said, if the measure is illegal, why keep it up illegally, when you may interpose legislative sanction? In the choice of difficulties, however, it was best to take the least; and, in his opinion, it was better to connive than to sanction. In other cases illegal orders had been issued by the privy council which parliament had thought proper to overlook. But was the Bank to be exposed to action upon their notes? This certainly was not a pleasant circumstance; but still the house ought to see that the Bank was not blameable in having brought on this state of things. That the right to sue and recover from the Bank was clear could not be denied; but every thing considered, he must be an evil-minded subject who could employ such an expedient; nor did he think there was much danger of its being used. He should be troubling the house to little purpose if he did not suggest some remedy to the evils which he deprecated, and as a substitute to that which he disapproved. What he had to propose he conceived would be attended with effect; nor would it be attended with delay, as the

right honorable gentleman had supposed. The perfect re-establishment of the Bank was the great object which they ought to have in view; without this the country was undone. All the expedients which had been talked of about new circulating medium were delusive. It was the nature of confidence, that, when once forfeited, all claims to it were refused. General confidence was not founded on reasonings, but on experience. Men took a bank-note because they saw a bank-note paid yesterday, and knew that it had been paid for a century—not because there might be plausible arguments of security to justify their confidence. They proceeded as the husbandman proceeds, to provide every thing which his agriculture requires—not upon a knowledge of the planetary system, but upon experience. It was experience of its being regularly paid that made men take a bank-note. Unless, therefore, that confidence was restored, unless you could again give currency to the saying, “as good as the Bank,” no expedient would be crowned with success. The method of effecting this re-establishment was simple: it was by a fair avowal of the situation of the Bank in all its details. They would then know whether the present crisis was produced by errors and faults; and if errors and faults existed, they should be retracted, and guarded against in future. It was of the utmost importance that it should appear that errors and faults had been committed by the Bank in their connexion with the minister. The sentiment of Demosthenes, so often quoted, was one which was particularly applicable to our present circumstances. If we were reduced to our present distress without error or misconduct, the state of the country was desperate, and there was no chance of retrieving our affairs. It was the interest of the directors that the public should know the true state of things. On the face of matters errors must have been committed. The modes which had been adopted to ascertain these points were not good, and

he did not expect they would be productive of much advantage. But was it not important to know whether the Bank had ever demanded from government the sums which it had advanced, and whether ministers had refused the claim? Was it not important to know whether the directors had remonstrated against any farther exports of specie, and the manner in which their representations were received? If they did act in this manner, then they escape the blame; but if they did not do what their duty required them to do, a cue might be found to discover, that the state to which the Bank has been reduced was owing to the misconduct of the directors. Above all, however, it was necessary to be explicit. The report of the committee had not stated any thing more than the gross sums of the amount of the debts and funds of the Bank; and however it might be known to some acquainted with their affairs in what their funds subsisted, there still prevailed a mystery as to the balance in their favor, whether the greater part of the four millions was in cash or otherwise. The report of the committee ought likewise to have explained, whether the order of council was adopted to accommodate the necessities of the Bank, or in contemplation of the exigencies of government. If it was on account of government, then there was no reason at all for inquiring into the state of the Bank; yet, when the right honorable gentleman must have been much better acquainted with it than the committee, he had made this the pretence of inquiry. When the right honorable gentleman, however, upon that report, stated that he had abandoned the idea of inflicting the guarantee of government upon the Bank, the information was cheered from every part of the house. It was, nevertheless, very extraordinary, that the right honorable gentleman, knowing what he knew, could have stated, as a pretence of inquiry, the intention of this guarantee. After enquiring whether the directors had done their duty,

it would be found, perhaps, that the embarrassments of the Bank had arisen from a departure from the original object of their institution, and from too close a connection with government. It was the more necessary to clear up and fix this point, after the ideas upon this subject advanced by a learned gentleman (the Solicitor General). Till such doctrines were held out to be unfounded, the credit of the Bank was irretrievable. It was necessary to guard against the effects of persuasion or of force, which might be employed by government at any future period. The Bank had departed from their original institution, contrary to that clause in the act of King William, prohibiting them for ever owing more than the amount of what was owing to them by government—a provision which left no risk to those with whom they transacted business. The departure from this principle had been likewise a cause of the difficulties under which they had laboured, and his first proposal was to restore the original principle. Another clause in the fifth of King William provides, that the Bank, under the penalty of forfeiting triple the amount, should not make any advances to government, but on funds granted by parliament. This tied up their hands from too liberal advances, and continued with great advantage till within three years, when a clause to repeal it was thrust by a side wind into an exchequer loan bill, by which an indemnity was given for past advances, and the control removed in future. Since that period the Bank had made advances to government, which it could not have done had this provision existed. His second proposal, therefore, was, to repeal the clause, and to re-establish the original prohibition. His third was, to enable the Bank to avail themselves of the capital due to them by government, and to give them means of recovery. These were the three points which he intended to propose. If the present capital was not sufficient, the sum of eleven millions might be in-

creased ; and then, independent of the profits of their transactions, and the assets they possessed, as long as the country existed the creditors of the Bank would have security in their dealings. These were the proposals which he meant to submit, in the view of adding, likewise, that government should repay a part, at least, of the advance which the Bank had made ; for while the vicious practices he had exposed continued to prevail, no permanent advantages could be expected. It certainly was a natural question to ask, Why government had not repaid some of the advances made by the Bank ? Why did not the right honorable gentleman call upon the country to contribute their assistance on so important an occasion ? After the vaunted spirit, the boasted resources of the nation, would it be impracticable to raise a sum of five or six millions within a few days for the great and important purpose of enabling the Bank of England to fulfil its engagements, and retrieve its credit ? If there was no feeling of justice, of honor, of integrity, of patriotism to prompt exertions on such an occasion, it was all over with this country. No purpose of war, no necessity of public service, no demand for pecuniary aid to the Emperor of Germany, could present a more forcible claim, or a more honorable cause of exertion. He did not think so ill of the country as to believe that the appeal could be resisted. If this were done the Bank might continue its discounts fairly, and with its own substance. Now, however, when the house was discussing its solvency, was it right or proper that the Bank should give an increased accommodation in the way of discount far beyond its former liberality ? It was very true the debt due by government to the Bank consisted of many articles, but it had been increasing greatly upon the head of exchequer bills. Instead of embarrassing the Bank by the advances for which it was called upon, it would be far better to raise elsewhere the sums which the Bank advanced on

the securities it received; and in this manner, at least, remove part of the pressure which the magnitude of the debt due by government had occasioned. The three first propositions he wished to be resolved in a committee of the whole house; at present he should conclude with moving, "That it appearing to this house that the effects of the Bank, on the 25th of February last, amounted to 17,597,280*l.*, and that the outstanding demands on the Bank amounted to 13,770,390*l.*; and it farther appearing, that there is owing to the Bank by government, for advances made for the public service, the sum of 9,964,113*l.* (exclusive of the permanent debt due from government of 11,686,800*l.*")

Resolved, "That it is highly expedient, as well for the honor of His Majesty's government, as for the re-establishment of public credit, that the speediest measures should be taken for the payment to the Bank of the said advances, or a considerable part thereof."

Mr. Pitt having spoken in reply to Mr. Sheridan, and moved the previous question,

Mr. Sheridan said, that he should occupy the attention of the house but a very few minutes. The right honorable gentleman had conjured up in his mind a proposition which he had attributed to him, and to that proposition he had devoted an answer of half an hour. His answer would have been extremely good if such a proposition had been made; but nothing was farther from his mind than the idea, that because government repaid the advances of the Bank, the public was to be deprived of the circulation of paper; so much the contrary, that he expressly said, to ease the Bank of the load under which they groaned for the government, would be the best way to enable them to increase their liberality to trade. Thus it appeared that the whole of the outstanding demands upon them amounted to 13,700,000*l.* Of this sum they had advanced 10,000,000*l.* to government. Relieve them from

this, and surely they would be better able to assist the commerce of the country. His motion, however, was not, it seemed, so improper in itself as that he had timed it ill. What! was not the pressure of public calamity the time for public relief? When the Bank was brought to a stand by the impolitic measures of government, surely it was the moment to pay them what we owed. Mr. Sheridan said, he saw that it was the intention of the right honorable gentleman to have a forced paper currency; he had given no answer to the question which he had asked, Whether bank-notes were to be made a legal tender? It was in vain to contend against the torrent which had broke in on the country. We were doomed to all the horrors of a paper-circulation, and that house tamely acquiesced in the desolation of all that was sacred in the kingdom. Already it was believed that between three and four millions of paper more had been issued since the stoppage of payment in money, and to what extent they might carry it, it was seemingly a matter of no importance to inquire.

The house then divided on the previous question; ayes 183; noes 45.

MARCH 13.

MR. HARRISON'S MOTION FOR THE REDUCTION OF USELESS PLACES.

Mr. Harrison moved, "That the extent of the supplies voted to government since the commencement of the present war, having caused so heavy an encrease of taxes, it is the duty of this house to enquire, whether some relief to the burdens of the people, or provision for farther expense, may not be obtained by the reduction of useless places, sinecure offices, exorbitant fees, and other modes of retrenchment in the expenditure of the public money."

Mr. Pitt replied to Mr. Harrison, and moved the previous question.

Mr. SHERIDAN. It is not possible to add much by way of argument to the proposition which is now before you, because nothing can, in my apprehension, be more clearly the duty of the house than to

inquire whether any relief may not be found to the people of this country by the abolition or retrenchment of sinecure places and pensions. Upon this proposition, however, clear as it is, the previous question has been moved and seconded; or, in other words, it has been moved that this is an untimely proposition, and that we were not at this moment in a situation in which such a proposition ought to be canvassed. With due respect to you, Sir, I believe I only speak the general opinion of this house when I say that you worthily fill that chair, and that it ought to be understood that you are the highest authority in this house; but when I state that you are the superior authority, I ought to correct my expression, at least in the opinion of one individual, for the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) who has just sat down, has told us that he is superior to you. He stands up and boldly avows that he has appointed a committee; the expression was a very remarkable one, he said, "when I appointed the committee." It was not a slip, for the very notice that was taken of it at the moment it was uttered, called on the right honorable gentleman to retract or qualify it, or to make some apology for having uttered it; but he did no such thing. I believe he disdained to make any apology. I should not have taken notice of the words if I considered them as a mere slip, but believing them to be no slip, I am bound to take them as the genuine sentiment of the right honorable gentleman. It is only one more specimen of his arrogance than we have witnessed before, and which he cannot deny. In my humble apprehension, the whole of the question will turn upon this very point, for the right honorable gentleman does not deny that there ought to be an inquiry into this subject; but his difficulty is, that he does not know what my honorable friend means to follow up with the pledge which he has proposed to the house by his motion, but he says he thinks the proper object of the motion will be attained by some-

thing which he has himself determined upon; for he says, that ever since he appointed the committee, he had a certain paper, which he intended to move as instructions to that committee, which will answer all the beneficial purposes for which the motion of my honorable friend is introduced. This shews us that he was sincere when he said he appointed a committee, and he spoke correctly, for he certainly did appoint that committee. But that is the very thing that I complain of, and wish to prevent the repetition of. I wish the motion of my honorable friend to be carried, and that it may be followed up by some measure that will prevent the minister from appointing another committee; for I do not want to refer any public measure to a committee appointed by him. I have heard it rumoured that I am one of the members who are appointed by the minister upon a committee; to which he says, he will refer the material part of my friend's motion. Now, without meaning the least personal disrespect to any of the members of that committee, I shall go into it with a perfect conviction that we shall make a report that will not in the least satisfy the minds of the public. I come now to the most material part of the minister's speech upon the subject which is now before us. The leading features of that speech tend to establish as a principle that corruption in public affairs is adapted to the very nature of our constitution, and that public business cannot be carried on without corruption. He has reminded us of Mr. Burke's bill, which was brought into this house in 1780, and carried into effect in 1782. That he calls a measure of confessed necessity, but he doubts whether the same necessity exists now, or rather he denies it. No man doubted the necessity then, and who are they who deny it now? Who will compare the situation of this country in the year 1780 with its situation now, and say, that the necessity of retrenchment is not infinitely greater now than it was then? It is true the necessities of this country were

thought to be great in the year 1780, and very great they were; but in the year 1780 the Bank of England had not stopped payment. Will any man in his senses compare the two periods, and then tell me that there is not now a greater reason, on the face of things at least, for examination and retrenchment than there was then? The minister's proposition goes to this extent, that sinecures and places of great emolument ought to be held in this country; that to abolish them all would be injurious to the public. I believe that something of this kind, but in a limited degree, was admitted at the time when Mr. Burke's bill passed. But taking this doctrine to be correct, and I do not dispute it, will the minister, or will any of those who sit around him, deny that since the passing of Mr. Burke's bill, places of great emolument and patronage have been created? That fees, which were supposed to be abolished by that bill, have been renewed? Have they not revived that which stood in the very front of that bill as an object of final extinction, the office of third secretary of state? I say it has been proved, that some of the things which were intended to be lopped off by that bill have been revived. I say the minister himself holds some things which ought to be lopped off. Does he deny it? What will he say of the seminary which was established for young statesmen? Will he tell exactly what his own fees are? And will he maintain that they are absolutely necessary, and that none of them are received by him but for proper services rendered to the public? At the time when Mr. Burke's bill passed, it meant and intended that there should soon follow a regulation with respect to the forests and crown lands; but of them the minister did not say a single word to-night; although at the time I have so often mentioned, the great patronage and influence they created were held forth as things to be abolished. The minister may say, and there are many offices in the Treasury and other public departments, that

are not over-paid. I verily believe there are; many of them I know to be very laborious ones, some of which I believe to be under paid; but does that prove that there are none of them over-paid? Indeed, when any man tells me so, I feel the absurdity so much, that I can hardly return a grave answer to such an assertion. I will pledge myself to this house, and to this country, to shew that all the waste and profligacy which attends places, pensions, and abuses of various public offices, is so great, as to be sufficient to maintain with bread all the laboring poor of this country. I do not speak hastily and at random; I have information to proceed upon, for I have been in a situation in which I had an opportunity of examining into these matters. I hold a paper that was put into my hand, that will tend to illustrate what I now say: it relates to a meritorious officer under the crown, an honorable gentleman who sits opposite me (Mr. Rose); he is secretary to the Treasury, with a salary of 3,200*l.* a year; clerk of parliament, that is, clerk to the house of lords, 4,000*l.*; master of the pleas, with another large salary; and several other offices, which make in all, upwards of 10,000*l.* a year. I am not denying the merit of that honorable gentleman; but when we are told that offices are paid on account of great and laborious duties, for God's sake let us understand the thing as it is; let us ask, whether all these offices, for instance, are performed by that honorable gentleman? and then let us ask ourselves, whether there is any thing here that may with safety to the public be lopped off? Suppose we turn our eyes to the situation of the right honorable gentleman himself (Mr. Pitt), I believe we shall find that he holds some that are not very laborious. Or if we take a view of the situation of a noble lord, a near connection of his, (Lord Grenville), who for a short time filled that chair, he holds a great sinecure office which was given to him some time ago; and what-

ever may be his merits, it is certain that he has not earned that sinecure by a very long, or very laborious employment in the public services. These are only a few things which I refer to; but there are instances after instances, which might be given of offices held, for which long and laborious services cannot be pleaded. I shall not go through them, because I know the house would not have any pleasure in the recital: I only mention those few to show upon what foundation the minister rests his general assertion of the necessity of these things. The main question for this house to consider, and which they ought to consider attentively, is this: Is there, or is there not, a general impression abroad that these things are severe grievances, and that by lopping many of them off the public may have considerable relief; for I agree with the minister, that unless that be so, it is idle to have recourse to, and very blameable to hold out to the public, any hope of relief from such a source. The minister seems to be much afraid of deluding the public with too much hope from such a resource as this. I can tell him, that I know the public have great expectations upon this subject; and if he sets about it properly, the public will not be deluded; for there is much to be done to relieve them in this way.

I do not look to the relief which the public will have in a pecuniary sense by the reduction of useless places merely, but I look also to the effect which that reduction will have; it will destroy that influence which has contributed so much to our undoing: had this been carried into execution before the commencement of the present war, we should not have had the hundred of millions added that have been to our national debt; we should not have had to mourn over the hundreds of thousands, and even millions, of our fellow-creatures, whose lives have been sacrificed to carry it on. Such we see has been the effect of this war; and the control over these useless places has been one of the most powerful means by which

ministers have been enabled to carry it on ; and that is the point of view in which I considered these things as formidable and calamitous to this country. The minister talks of the expectation of the public, as if he was perfectly at ease upon the matter.— Does he reflect upon the impression he has made upon the public mind by the bribery he has employed to gain votes in this house, in advising His Majesty to make so lavish a distribution of the peerage? There are no less than one hundred and sixty peers created since the commencement of the present administration. When we see the people suffering their burdens with such an admirable patience, have we no reason to apprehend that they will reflect on these things: and should we wonder if, at last, all which has been said upon the necessity of the war by those who have been so favored, was only said by them to answer the purpose of their own aggrandizement? That they were only pursuing what they had in view all their life-time? This will impress on the people, that every public man who obtains rewards from the minister, only thinks of his own interest, without the least attention to public welfare. I have heard a member of this house say, that some persons were made peers who were not fitter for that honor than his groom ; but, unfortunately for me, I cannot call upon that gentleman to verify that fact here, for he is now made a peer himself. I understand there is another batch of peers about to be created, and, from the names I have seen, no doubt that, while opulence is deemed to be one of the requisites for that distinction, as I think it is, they may be very fit ; but when session after session this practice is followed to keep up influence, what are the public to think? I am afraid their minds are made up upon the matter. Much reference has been had to-night to the labors of Mr. Burke. I have read many of his productions, among them a work entitled, “ Thoughts on a Regicide Peace.” Although

I detest the principle on which that, as well as many others of that author's works is founded, yet there is a sentiment in it which, I think, is founded in wisdom. After a beautiful metaphor, he says, "That the gross mass of the people of every country will be directed and moved by the example of men of superior minds and superior authority."—This observation I wish the house to bear in mind. We cannot reasonably call on the mass of the people to bear their disasters with patience, but from the pure example of men of superior minds and superior authority. If ever there was a moment in which the higher classes ought to shew their disinterested dispositions, and their love of the public good, unmixed with any wishes for their own advantage, it is the moment at which I am speaking. Instead of which, to the shame of government, and, in my opinion, to the shame of this house, there is a general principle cherished which supports corruption to an unlimited extent. I hope the minister will reflect on these things, or, at least, that this house will reflect upon them. The minister has said, that he had in his contemplation to move instructions to the committee, which will answer all the beneficial purposes which are intended by this motion. It is a little remarkable, that we never heard of these instructions before; and my honorable friend has given a pretty long notice of his intention to bring this subject forward.

Mr. Rose replied to Mr. Sheridan.

Mr. Sheridan said, in explanation, that he did not mean to say any thing harsh against the honorable gentleman who had just spoken. He was a man of great application and industry; he had stated facts as he understood them to be; but that that honorable gentleman had not informed the house of the total amount of his income under government. He admitted that services ought to be well paid for, but he contended that large sums of money should not

be given under the title of rewards for services, when, in fact, nothing was done for them. Now that gentleman was clerk of the house of lords, for which he did nothing. The office was, indeed, a very laborious one, but it was performed by Cowper. He would now ask the honorable gentleman, whether he had not secured the reversion of that place to his own relation for no service whatever, while the gentleman who performs the duties of the office has nothing? With respect to the address of the house of lords, he understood that that address did not specify that honorable gentleman as a person to fill the office, although he had the good fortune to obtain it.

The house divided : for the previous question 169 ; against it 77.

MARCH 22.

STOPPAGE OF CASH PAYMENTS AT THE BANK.

A debate took place on the clause granting an indemnity to the Bank.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that the honorable gentleman (Mr. Dundas) had asked if ever there had been an act of indemnity that did not go back to the first step on which it was founded, and it was true that such was the mode when the house approved the measure ; but the propriety of the indemnity to the Bank was not yet ascertained. To give an indemnity without examination, was to establish the principle that the Bank were always justified in obeying an order of council, and were always to have an act of indemnity. Whether an indemnity was to be given to all bankers was a difficult question. No association could secure merchants and bankers against demands in specie from abroad. It was a degrading situation to which they were reduced ; left to the mercy of those who were mischievous enough to press for payments in cash, while they had no means of making the payment. With re-

gard to the liberality of the Bank in discounts, he knew that those who held the propriety of the Bank limiting its discounts, were represented as men who wished to cripple the commerce by withholding those accommodations which were necessary to its support. So far, however, was he from wishing to deprive commerce of any means of support and encouragement, that he thought the Bank instituted for commercial purposes, and wished to see that connection between government and the Bank dissolved, by which it had been prevented from fulfilling its proper purposes. He wished this divorce to take place, that commerce might receive that share of attention and indulgence to which it was entitled, and that the Bank might safely exercise that liberality of discount which was required. But if there were two customers, one of whom had obtained accommodation to the amount of ten millions, and the other three, how was it possible that the commercial advantages to be expected could be derived from the Bank? Public meetings had been held, at which a respectable member of the house (Alderman Lushington) had presided, at which it had been resolved to apply to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to interpose his authority with the Bank. From this it appeared, that the Bank had been thought to be niggardly, and the success which these gentlemen had so soon experienced from their application, had naturally been imputed to the authority of the minister. He was glad to hear, however, what had been said by the two directors of the Bank. Till the co-operation, not to say collusion, which had been manifested by the Bank in all the transactions of government was abolished, the credit of the Bank could never be restored.—He was desirous to know if the arguments used by the Chancellor of the Exchequer were coupled with a promise to pay what was due by government. If not, the Bank, by continuing to issue paper without limits, would soon be reduced to a state of absolute

insolvency. Those who had access to any of the Bank directors, well knew, and a noble friend of his (Lord Lauderdale), a person not apt to take up a fact upon slight grounds, had stated in his work upon the finances of the country, that ever since Spring, 1796, remonstrances had been made to ministers against sending so much money out of the country, and stating that the ruin of the Bank would be the inevitable consequence. He hoped this was true, for it would afford some prospect that by better management their affairs might be retrieved. He did not think that there was any cause for haste in the present measure. Notwithstanding the intimation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer when this business was first opened, that it was necessary to follow up the order of council by a legislative measure without delay, a month had nearly elapsed without any thing been done; and if a judgment could be formed from the time it had been in preparation, there would be no end to the bill, should it be carried into effect. He would repeat, therefore, what he had said before, that it would be better to suspend the proceeding altogether, than to hazard the evils which its enactment, without the prospect of a limitation, would produce.

The clause was carried without a division.

MARCH 24.

STOPPAGE OF CASH PAYMENTS AT THE BANK.

The house in an adjourned committee on the bill for indemnifying the Bank, for suspending the payment of notes in specie, proceeded to read the residue of the clauses. On reading the exception contained in the clause for the purpose of securing the payment of the army and navy, a debate ensued.

Mr. SHERIDAN considered the speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as a direct confession of the establishment of a military government.—What would the army say, when they heard the

right honorable gentleman's arguments? They would say this—"The Chancellor of the Exchequer has avowed, that he dares not refuse us, because we have arms in our hands." What was this but acknowledging that the country was under a despotic government? The soldiers would next insist upon the continuance of their allowance of bread; they would make fresh demands, and enforce them, by coming down to the house with arms in their hands.

Sir Michael Le Fleming spoke to order. Mr. Sheridan, he conceived, had said, that the soldiers would abide by a particular measure if they liked it, and if they did not, they would come down to the house with arms in their hands. This he considered as a libel upon the army.

Mr. Sheridan allowed that the worthy baronet was quite right in calling to order, but that unfortunately he had fixed upon the wrong person. The argument which he had been using, was to shew that the minister had been making invidious distinctions between the people and the army, and that he thought so ill of the military as to suppose that they would insist on being paid in cash. The charge, therefore, against the right honorable gentleman was, that he had spoken of the army as wishing to be put on a different footing in point of payment from all the rest of the country. It was, therefore, on this ground that he made sure of the worthy Baronet's vote; for it was the Chancellor who had pronounced a libel upon the army, not the person who had been called to order. To the question respecting the safety to be derived from the military, he should only reply, that there was but one person in the country who would not be more safe without a military government. To the clause in question he wished to object, and to move that the Treasury should have the power of drawing upon the Bank for specie, only for the payment of the army and navy abroad.

Mr. Sheridan afterwards said, that he hoped the

time was not far off when he should see the Chancellor of the Exchequer held up as the author of all the fatal calamities which have befallen the country, and made solely responsible for them. It was on this account that he had said in a former part of the debate, he knew but of one man in the house who had occasion to wish to pay the army in cash, in order to ensure military protection.

The clause was carried without a division. The Chairman next read the clause for fixing the duration of the restriction on the Bank.

Mr. Sheridan could not agree, he said, with the honorable baronet, that the Bank never could pay again; he thought, on the contrary, they might do so very well, and in much less time than that fixed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. This was, on condition that government paid as large a portion of their debt to the Bank, as he understood they meant to do, notwithstanding the taunting and scornful manner in which the right honorable gentleman had, some time since, treated that proposition, when made by him. He made a fanciful allusion to the Bank:—an elderly lady in the city, of great credit and long standing, who had lately made a *faux pas*, which was not altogether inexcusable. She had unfortunately fallen into bad company, and contracted too great an intimacy and connection at the St. James's end of the town. The young gentleman, however, who had employed all his "arts of soft persuasion" to seduce this old lady, had so far shewn his designs, that, by timely cutting and breaking off the connection, there might be hopes for the old gentlewoman once more regaining her credit and injured reputation.—In order to facilitate this, he should support the amendment of his right honorable friend. On the same ground, he thought, as to the plan of the honorable baronet, that it would be better put off till the committee had made its report on the causes which gave rise to the order of council. He alluded to the remote causes; the

proximate causes were very plain, and well known. Government wanted money, and could not do without it; they knew there was money in the Bank, and they laid their hands upon it; the Bank knew their power, and dared not refuse it. In the same way, said he, if a highwayman met me on Bagshot Heath, put a pistol to my breast, and demanded my money,—the proximate clause is, that the highwayman wanted money, and had a pretty certain notion that there was a sum in my pocket. The proximate cause of the highwayman was clearly want of money; the proximate cause of my letting him take it from me is, that I feared he would take away my life if I denied him. The house were in possession, therefore, of the proximate cause; and the more distant ones we hope to be acquainted with soon. He hoped, therefore, the honorable baronet would postpone his plan till the committee had made their report on all the causes relative to the order of council.

The clause was carried, and the report ordered to be received on the 27th.

MARCH 28.

GENERAL DEFENCE OF THE COUNTRY.

Colonel Wood moved, "That an humble address be presented to His Majesty, beseeching him to be graciously pleased to direct His Royal Highness the Commander-in-chief, the Master-general of the Ordnance, in conjunction with other able and experienced navy and military officers, on whose judgment and abilities His Majesty most relied, to take into their consideration the present state of the country, and to consult and determine upon any other measures of security."

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that the question to be considered, in the present motion, was, whether the general defence of the country was defective or not; and whether the duty of defending it was well performed? If it was to be contended that ministers would take care to see it performed, he certainly

would not depend on them. They might have information sent them from various quarters as to the place the enemy intended to land; or where a set of jacobins might lie in wait, in this country, to join them on their landing; but, at the same time, they might be guilty of misconduct, while the Commander-in-chief did his duty. He did not like to hear this motion opposed, on the ground that every necessary measure was already taken for the defence of the country; and that it would convey a reflection on the Commander-in-chief. If such a motion had been made in the Irish house before the French came to Bantry Bay, the same answer would have been given: "What! can you for a moment doubt the abilities and vigilance of the Commander-in-chief?" But so far was that country from having been in a state of defence, and so far from there being any force waiting for Monsieur Hoche, (or Monster Hoche, according to the very liberal expression of the Irish chancellor,) that the French remained several days in Bantry Bay. It was a fortunate event for Ireland, as well as for this country, they did not land. They had been very near coming to a right anchorage; and if they had, they might have landed and proceeded to Cork immediately. After an instance of such deplorable neglect, the house ought not, upon the assertion of the minister, to conclude that this country was perfectly secure. There ought to have been a communication between the heads of the naval and military departments, in order that their joint efforts should be combined to protect the country; but it did not appear that any such communication had taken place. For these reasons he would support the motion.

Mr. Dundas moved an adjournment, which was carried.

MARCH 31.

ADVANCES TO THE EMPEROR.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he was extremely anxious to know when there was a probability of a report from the secret committee; because, if it was to be made soon, it would save him the trouble of moving for some information, which would be necessary in the motion he intended to make upon the propriety of sending more money to the Emperor. In the returns before the house, of the advances already made, there appeared the sum of 500,000*l.*, which had been ordered by parliament; and there also appeared in advance, since the stoppage of the Bank, of 220,000*l.* upon, what appeared to him, very strange security. There was, in the first place, the receipt of the agent, and the assurance of the imperial envoy, that it should be repaid out of any loan that might in future be advanced to the Emperor. From this circumstance, it appeared probable, that another loan was in contemplation. He could not avoid making an observation upon the nature of the security: it was precisely the same, as if a man had borrowed ten guineas, and, when asked for payment, replied, "If you will lend me twenty guineas more, I will pay you the ten." He hoped that the right honorable gentleman opposite to him would meet this question fully; for he must have made up his mind upon the question, whether or no any farther advances were to be made to the Emperor. If the right honorable gentleman would meet him fairly upon that point, he should bring forward his motion on Tuesday; otherwise there were several papers which would be material for his motion. He therefore moved, "That there be laid before the house copies of the representations made to government by the Directors of the Bank of England, with respect to the advances to the Emperor, since the 1st of January, 1795."

Mr. Pitt replied.

Mr. Sheridan said, that the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) had answered his questions very fairly. He hoped, when the discussion came on, he should not then be told that the time was not fit; but that it would be argued on its real merits.

Mr. Sheridan's motion was not persisted in.

APRIL 3.

ADVANCES FROM THE BANK TO GOVERNMENT.

Mr. SHERIDAN moved, that there be laid before the house, a copy of all communications that have taken place between the Directors of the Bank of England and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, upon the advances that have been made to government since the 1st of November, 1794, exclusive of the papers that have been laid before the house this day.

Agreed to.

APRIL 4.

ADVANCES TO THE EMPEROR.

Mr. SHERIDAN rose, in pursuance of his notice, to call the attention of the house to the subject of making any farther advances to the Emperor, and proceeded to the following effect:—

It is unnecessary for me to say any thing upon the importance of the subject which stands for discussion this day: I must, however, observe, that such discussion must be attended with some embarrassment: I have before me but a choice of difficulties; for as it is important that the discussion which I bring forward should take place as early as possible, so it is also desirable that the decision of the house should be grounded on proper information. I believe there never was a subject brought before parliament which excited more anxiety in the public mind, or to which the nation looked

with more impatience, than they do at this hour, for the decision of this house with respect to a future loan to the Emperor. It is a point which, in my opinion, involves the question, Whether they are to be saved or ruined? And it is to his Imperial Majesty himself highly important to know, as speedily as possible, and before he commences the most important campaign that was, perhaps, ever opened in Europe, what is the determination of this house upon the subject of sending money out of this country at this awful moment. It is essential for the people of this country to know what is to be taken from them, and essential for his Imperial Majesty to know upon what he is to rely. In discussing this momentous question, I am ready to admit, that whatever I may think of the necessity or the prudence of advances that have been already made by us to foreign powers, we should at all events keep good faith; and, therefore, it is highly important, indeed essential, to our welfare, that we consider duly, before we encourage in the Emperor a hope that he is to have any aid from us in the future prosecution of this war. With this view of the subject, I moved for certain accounts, from which the house might collect information, and such as I took to be essential to the subject in discussion. To that motion there ought to have been made a return very different from that small scratch which is exhibited on the paper now before us, and which I took into my hand just as I came into the house. I was in hopes, when I made the motion yesterday, and as I took pains to explain it to a right honorable gentleman before the rising of the house, that the whole of the information I wanted, and which my motion called for, would have been laid before the house to-day; but I understood there was much difficulty in complying with the whole request; and that great embarrassment would arise from that compliance, on account of many of the papers which I wanted being before a committee now en-

gaged in an important enquiry, who could not deliver copies of them consistently with the secrecy which it is at present a part of their duty to observe. I determined not to press any farther now for these papers. Under these circumstances, I feel that I come forward under great disadvantages: the information upon which I must proceed is extremely imperfect. Had we the whole before us, I should feel it my duty to call upon the house to declare, that no more money should be sent to the Emperor: indeed, if the information were complete, I think the house would see, that sending any more money from this country, at this moment, would be out of the question. What I chiefly wish for, and what I lament is not before us, is the whole of the correspondence between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Bank directors, since the year 1791, upon the subject of sending money to the Emperor. If the right honorable gentleman wishes to come to a free discussion of the question, —whether it be essential to the true interests of this country that farther advances should be made to the Emperor at this moment, under all the circumstances by which we are surrounded, whatever may have been the opinion of the Bank directors, and without entering into any calculations that have been made by them respecting the trade and commerce of this country,—I shall be ready to argue the subject with him in that way; and I shall not desire the opinion of the Bank directors. I think the subject may be now discussed without their opinions, as far as the motion with which I shall conclude, will call for that discussion. Had I waited, I might have the whole of the opinions which have been given from time to time by the Bank directors, upon the subject of advances to the Chancellor of the Exchequer; but I did not see the absolute necessity for doing so. Some may say, it is premature to enquire into the question of prudence in advancing more money to the Emperor,

before we have had a complete investigation of the causes which led to the order in council, by which the Bank were directed to stop payment. That appears to me to be very unwise counsel; for by it you may be led to defer the remedy until it is too late. It may be said, that you should not apply your remedy until you know the cause of the order; that, I own, is figuratively very correct; but if you attempt to carry it into practice, it may be fatal to the patient. If a physician were to order, that neither a bandage nor a styptic should be applied to a bleeding wound, until he had discovered the cause of the complaint, his patient would stand in danger of dying before the remedy could be applied by this deliberate and methodical physician; or, if the Humane Society were to order that no person should be attempted to be brought to active life from a state of suspended animation, until the coroner's inquest had sat upon the body, and brought in their verdict, "Felo de se—death by the visitation of Providence—accidental death—or murder by some persons unknown,"—I apprehend their efforts would not be very useful. Here we are, I admit it, in a state of suspended animation; or, if we are assassinated, it is by persons who are much too well known. Having made these preliminary observations, I shall now proceed upon the more immediate points of the subject which it is the business of the house to investigate this day.

A worthy baronet (Sir William Pulteney) has given his opinion upon part of this subject before. I have already said, that I differed from that opinion. It is not necessary now to recite that opinion, nor to enter at large into that which constitutes the difference between us. I hope that public credit will be revived, and that in the person of the Bank of England. I am also confident, that whether you endeavor to establish a bank upon the faith of the landed property of this country, or whether you try any other means, that no such attempts should be made until you are entirely satisfied that

public credit cannot be restored in the person of the Bank of England.

From what I have heard abroad, and from the two papers which have been laid upon the table this day, I am glad to see that the Bank appears to have made such a stand against the measures which have led to this effect. I have, from the commencement, declared openly and freely what I thought of the conduct of the Bank. Upon the face of things, they certainly appear to have been guilty of errors and some degree of criminality. It is, therefore, I say, with much satisfaction, I perceive from the papers on your table, that they are less to blame than I at first surmised. This will afford subject matter for joy to the country at large; because, in addition to their being a corporate body, for purposes more immediately relating to themselves, the Bank are the channel through which the public creditor is paid. It would, therefore, Sir, unless it could be proved that they had done something to forfeit their charter—it would, therefore, I repeat it, be rash and improper to deprive them of that channel, or to make them no longer the medium through which the public creditor was to be paid. With respect to the Bank in the present instance, it does appear, that not at a late period only, not at a time immediately preceding the order of council, but that from the end of the year 1794, they have been unceasing in their representations to the minister, whose obstinate perseverance has brought the country to its present calamitous situation, and who was repeatedly pressing the Bank for advances, which he incessantly promised to repay, but which promise he never kept. If, Sir, it shall appear by these papers that the Bank frequently remonstrated against the measure of making the treasury bills payable at the Bank; if it shall appear, that not once or twice, but that they had nine distinct promises from him to abstain from that practice; if it shall appear that the right honorable gentleman promised to bring down the advances of the Bank from 2,500,000*l.* to 500,000*l.*, as re-

requested by the Bank ; if it shall appear that he almost gave a pledge to bind himself, by a parliamentary measure, to make this reduction ; if it shall be seen that he never kept any of these promises ; if it shall appear that, notwithstanding these violations of the most solemn engagements, the Bank, with a too-blameable facility, continued to afford supplies to him upon representations which amounted to intimidation—I say, Sir, if these things shall appear, if the house shall find that the Bank continued their remonstrances until the very eve of issuing the order of council, which they did not solicit, and which they did not want for their own affairs, I shall think, however the directors of the Bank may be culpable, from their too great facility, yet, that they stand clear of much of the blame, which, in the first instance, we might be inclined to attach to them, and which, in a very superior degree, is imputable to the right honorable gentleman. The papers that have been laid upon the table afford us some light into this part of the subject. Let us have recourse to some of the documents upon this subject—I say some of them, because they are not all before us.

On the 3d of December, 1795, the court of directors of the Bank came to the following resolution, which was communicated to the minister:—

Resolved, That the following resolution of the court be communicated to the Chancellor of the Exchequer:—

*That the court of directors, after a very solemn deliberation, adequate to the importance of the subject, are unanimously of opinion, that should such a loan (viz. a loan of 3,000,000*l.* to the Emperor) take place, they are but too well grounded in declaring (from the actual effects of the Emperor's last loan, and the continued drains of specie and bullion they still experience), that they have the most cogent reasons to apprehend very momentous and alarming consequences.*

They are, therefore, led to hope (after their expressing their acknowledgments to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for having hinted that the welfare and safety of the Bank, should in this matter supersede every other consideration), that he will be pleased to lay aside the adoption of such a measure, which they beg leave to repeat, would be, in their opinion, most fatal in its consequences.

On the 14th of January, 1756, they came to the following opinion, which was likewise communicated to the minister :—

It is the opinion of the committee of treasury, that the governor and deputy governor should represent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, That they cannot look upon the scheme of assisting the Emperor to raise a loan in Germany, by the guarantee of the parliament of Great Britain, in any light which will not, one way or other, be detrimental to this country, even if a law were passed by parliament to prevent British subjects from taking any share therein.

That such a call for money in Germany will occasion demands of it from hence. German, Italian, and other foreign capitalists, who have property here, will be induced to draw it away.

People in Holland, who by the late acts have money locked up here, may go to Germany, and draw for it from thence.

That funds, which would otherwise be employed in speculations of trade with England, may, by such an opportunity of investment at home, be diverted from the one to the other purpose.

That the exchange between this country and Hamburgh may be much affected by it.

That, in spite of legal prohibitions, it is to be apprehended, that some people here would take shares in such a negotiation, under the names of their foreign correspondents.

From these and other causes, they are fully of opinion, that the governor and deputy governor can give no advice to Mr. Pitt in favor of such a measure ; which is, indeed, of a wide political extent, and beyond the line of their duty to judge.

These are but a small part of the proofs that ought to be before us ; the rest are still more important to shew the premeditated design of the minister, and his obstinate perseverance, notwithstanding the declared opinions which were given upon the subject from the authorities to which I have alluded.

On the 11th of February, 1796, there was formed the following resolutions :

Resolved, That it is the opinion of this court, founded upon its experience of the effects of the late imperial loan, that if any farther loan or advance of money to the Emperor, or to any other foreign state, should, in the present state of affairs, take place, it will, in all probability, prove fatal to the Bank of England.

The court of directors do therefore most earnestly deprecate the adoption of any such measure ; and they solemnly protest against any responsibility for the calamitous consequences that may follow thereupon.

Resolved, That the governor and deputy governor do communicate these resolutions to the Chancellor of His Majesty's Exchequer.

The house shall now hear the answers of the ministers to these opinions and remonstrances :—

ANSWER TO THE FIRST.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer having perused the resolution with great attention, repeatedly said, that certainly, as matters were there stated, he should not think at present of bringing forward such a measure ; adding, that though he should, in opening the budget make it known that he made reserve with the present contractors for the loan, to permit the Emperor's raising three millions should circumstances require it, he should lay aside all thoughts of it, unless the situation of things, relative to the Bank, should so alter as to render such loan of no importance or inconvenience to them in perspective.

The governor promised him, that should such a change take place, and he should wish for the adoption of such a measure, he certainly would communicate it to him with pleasure.

Mr. Pitt wished very much to have the paper left with him for the purpose of communicating its contents to the cabinet, if he found it necessary ; promising, that no one should have a sight of it elsewhere, and that if the governor would call upon him in two or three days, he would return it to him.

ANSWER TO THE SECOND.

Mr. Pitt replied, that after the repeated intimations which he had given to the Governor and Deputy-Governor of the Bank, that no farther loan to the Emperor would be resolved on without previous communication with the Bank, and due consideration of the state of their circumstances, he did not see any reason for these resolutions ; that he did suppose they were adopted in a moment of alarm, and that he should consider them in that light.

After this solemn promise, and after expressing his idea, that the last resolution was adopted in the moment of alarm, he agreed to send a million and a half to the Emperor without the knowledge of parliament, and with a determination that parliament should not know it. If I am not misinformed, all the advances that were made to ministers, were accompanied with very strong remonstrances against the mischievous tendency which they had on the credit of the Bank, and which remonstrances were answered by repeated assurances that the sums should be punctually repaid. If what I heard upon

the subject be true, the Chancellor of the Exchequer ought not only to dread the anger of the public for his conduct in this business, but he ought to be ashamed even to face the cabinet itself. On the 6th of October commenced the present session of parliament: now mark the words which the present minister put into the mouth of the Sovereign on that day in addressing the two houses of parliament: His Majesty was made to say on that day, amongst other things,

I rely on your zeal and public spirit for such supplies as you may think necessary for the service of the year. It is a great satisfaction to me to observe, that, notwithstanding the temporary embarrassments which have been experienced, the state of the commerce, manufactures, and revenue of the country, proves the real extent and solidity of our resources, and furnishes you such means as must be equal to any exertions which the present crisis may require.

I say, that when these words were uttered, the Chancellor of the Exchequer knew from the representations of the Bank, he knew from the past exertions made to supply the Emperor, the Bank would be unable to continue its advances, without being in danger of that which has since actually happened: this he knew when he penned the speech to which I have alluded, and deliberately put into the mouth of the Sovereign, that which he, the minister, knew to be a falsehood. He cannot plead ignorance of these things; he had no means of avoiding the knowledge of them. The Bank, I own, were blameable in complying with the minister's demands, but he was criminal in making such demands. These loans avowed, and the loan concealed, brought the Bank to its present condition; in which we see it unable to pay the public creditor.

I now come to the order in council. The whole of that proceeding is founded upon the representation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. None of the proceedings which led to that order are in writing, I believe; they keep no journal; I wish they did, and I wish that the minutes of that business

were before this house. I should like that the house should see, whether the representations made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer had any resemblance to truth. To see, whether he laid before the council the various remonstrances that were made to him by the Directors of the Bank. Whether he informed the council of one word of the real state of the Bank. I say I wish these things could be brought before the public. All that appears upon that subject is, that the order in council was made upon the mere assertion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. These are the words of the order in council :

Upon the representation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, stating, that from the result of the information which he has received, and of the inquiries which it has been his duty to make respecting the effect of the unusual demands for specie, that have been made upon the metropolis, in consequence of ill-founded or exaggerated alarms in different parts of the country, it appears, that unless some measure is immediately taken, there may be reason to apprehend a want of a sufficient supply of cash to answer the exigencies of the public service. It is the unanimous opinion of the board, that it is indispensably necessary for the public service, that the Directors of the Bank of England should forbear issuing any cash in payment until the sense of parliament can be taken on that subject, and the proper measures adopted thereupon, for maintaining the means of circulation, and supporting the public and commercial credit of the kingdom at this important conjuncture ; and it is ordered, that a copy of this minute be transmitted to the Directors of the Bank of England, and they are hereby required on the grounds of the exigency of the case to conform thereto until the sense of parliament be taken as aforesaid.

Now, I ask, was this a representation of the truth? Or was it a falsehood? Was the pressure actually produced by the unusual demands for specie that were made upon the metropolis? Or was it not the gradual growing result of that which was repeatedly stated by the Bank to the Chancellor of the Exchequer? I say it was from the latter, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer knew it, and it is an aggravation of his guilt that he abused the unsuspecting temper of His Majesty, who was present at this council, by misrepresenting the fact.

I have stated all the communications we know of

between the Bank and the minister. We have the authority of the former, that the advances to the Emperor were the main cause of the difficulties in which we are now involved. This I should think pretty good authority. But when we see all their predictions verified by the event, I must respect their opinion more. I say, Sir, these arguments are sufficient to prove, that we are bound to expect from the minister, before any farther advances are made to the Emperor, full proof that those advances will be compatible with the revival of public credit. Upon that part of the subject I admit that there is a defect, arising from our not having the whole information necessary. But leaving, for a moment, out of the discussion, the question of the degree of deference due to the Bank, and the possibility that their opinion may be invalidated by the testimony of other persons, more acquainted, we may be told, with the interests of the Bank than the directors themselves; but taking it for granted that we shall have a cross examination upon the subject, I pass it by for the present, and proceed to state what my opinion is, of another loan to the Emperor, in the present state of the country. I wish to take the question fairly, and to put out of my mind the prudential reasons of the case, and the probability of re-payment; though on the face of it we are not, as guardians of the public purse justified in lending money without a probability of its being repaid. But I will fairly admit, that if another loan be necessary for our co-operation, and if it be connected with the vital interests of the state, the prospect of repayment is a subordinate consideration. The gentlemen on the opposite side seem to be glad of this admission. I am not surprized that they are glad I admit it, because they must see that there is no probability of repayment. His Imperial Majesty was bound to pay the first loans by instalments, to discharge the interest punctually, and to send a commissioner to this country as his agent.

He failed in all these engagements ; he paid no instalments, was not punctual in paying the interest, and sent no commissioner, whom, I should have thought, he might have sent, because it would have been attended with little or no expense. That he paid the interest by more loans I grant ; but the commissioner was wholly omitted. As to any future prospect of repayment, we have this pretty satisfaction, that, by the last paper laid upon the table, the Emperor engages to repay the 500,000*l.* that has been advanced to him out of any further loan that may be furnished. There are no means so good as this : Mexico and Peru are not so excellent a source—they may by some accident fail ; but if one debt is to be repaid, only when a man lends you more money, there is no security half so solid and so strong. We have, by the treaty respecting the first loan, a security upon the Emperor's hereditary dominions ; we have a claim upon Brabant ; the Netherlands are mortgaged to us ; we are, I may safely say, not mortgagees in possession ; and as the French do not seem inclined to cede them to us, I do not lay much stress upon that security. But as an argument in favor of another loan, it is said, that the Emperor's resources will be amply sufficient after the war. If that is the case, it is a strong reason against imposing such additional burthens upon this country, in its present exhausted state ; but if it should not be the case, will it not render the prospect of repayment more distant ? But I will not dwell upon this part of the subject, because if farther advances are connected with the vital interests of the state, it will be immaterial to my argument, whether they are furnished by way of gift or of loan. In considering the subject in the next point of view, I shall not state it as a method of forcing peace. I by no means take it even as an indirect mode tending to lead to peace, but as the worst means of continuing the war. Under this impression, I contend that whatever gentlemen may think of

the war, whether they think that it ought to be carried on *ad internecionem* ; that it was just and necessary in its origin, and wise and practicable in its object ; that it was, in short, every thing which I do not think it ; I say, whatever their opinions may be, they ought still to support my proposition ; because the question is not whether another loan will or will not be an accommodation to the Emperor, but whether it will do him greater benefit, or us greater injury. This is the fair way of considering it ; and in that point of view it must be proved, what never has been attempted to be proved, that the Emperor cannot take the field without another loan. Are we to suppose that, notwithstanding the former sums that have been sent to him, he cannot make any vigorous effort without this new one ? Will gentlemen argue, that he can make no military exertions except his troops are well paid ? I will not remind those gentlemen of their declaration so often made, that the French must fly before troops disciplined and regularly paid. We have fatal experience of the folly of those declarations ; we have seen soldiers frequently without pay, not seldom without sufficient provisions, put to rout the best paid armies in Europe. If I am to be told that they are influenced by a principle “ which they of the adverse party want ; ” that they possess an enthusiastic attachment to the cause which they support ; that they are actuated by a spirit of indignation at the oppression attempted to be exerted against them—that it is this has nerved their arms and steeled their hearts ; if I am to be told that the Emperor, even for his last stake, cannot rouse his subjects to such efforts, and such enthusiasm ; why then, I say the cause is desperate indeed, and you will be throwing away your money, without being able to do any effectual service to your ally. And do I demand from the subjects of Austria greater sacrifices than have been made by the people of Great Britain ? By these sacrifices have we been reduced to our present situation.

Having, therefore, been so reduced, we must see the absolute necessity of restoring public credit by all the means in our power. We must never lose sight of this, that it is the credit of Great Britain that has been the terror of her enemies: it is her life-blood and marrow; and whenever it is gone, she will be reduced, not, perhaps, to a lifeless body, but to a small and insignificant trunk in the eyes of all Europe. I say, Sir, therefore, we must look to our actual situation. I have lately sat upon the secret committee, and I beg here to say, that no intention has been discovered to disguise any thing from that committee. I feel myself responsible for every figure taken, except where objections were stated that the committee did not go fully into all the circumstances, merely, as will appear, on account of the pressure of time. The result will be this, that we have doubled the national debt; that if this campaign be the last, twenty-six millions will not pay our permanent peace establishment; and if this campaign be, as I have said before, the last, we must in addition to the burdens under which the people labour, lay five millions of additional taxes. These are no slight considerations. There are others which the right honorable gentleman knows are of equal importance. How these additional taxes can be raised without the restoration of public credit—commerce depending solely upon that credit—I leave to others to determine. Under these circumstances, I would say to our ally, you must not ask me to do that which can only afford you temporary aid, but which must bring on me full and entire destruction. If we cast our eyes over the whole of the empire, we shall find no where pleasing prospects to dwell upon: even India, which we were fondly taught to expect assistance from, the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Dundas) knows is labouring under a pressure of a similar nature with this country—an army is on foot watching Tippoo; and even our old ally, the nabob of Arcot, is not in a state of perfect good understand-

ing. In the West Indies, if we are to keep the conquests, which with a savage barbarity we persist in making in St. Domingo, only to purchase graves for our gallant countrymen, you must look, not only to your present expenses, but to your permanent peace establishment. At home, we are told, money is the only commodity in which the army will be paid; that the internal peace of the country depends upon it. We are told, by insinuation, that the burdens of the people are so great, that the repose of every member in the house rests upon the army being paid in specie. Look to the state of Ireland, if we can possibly retain our connection with that kingdom—if a civil war in that country, brought on by the detestable measures that have been adopted by ministers, can be avoided, must there not be a supply of money for the maintenance of public credit there? Is it not a fact, that Mr. Pelham, who was here a month ago, was assured that part of the loan that was to be raised in this country, should be for the service of Ireland; and that he was promised a million and a half in hard gold—a promise made, I should suppose, under a firm conviction of its being the only means of procuring peace in that kingdom, if peace can be procured by any means? Upon the state of the funds in this country, I look back to a year from the day on which I am now speaking. I find that the five per cents were then at 101, and the three per cents $69\frac{1}{2}$. What are they on this day? The five per cents are at $72\frac{1}{2}$, and the three per cents at $49\frac{1}{2}$. And this in one year. What may be their fall in another year is a calculation that must appal the stoutest mind to contemplate. Can any thing be done to restore the funds but by restoring public credit? It may be said, that in the present state of the country, it is wrong to lay before the public so dark a statement. I say, Sir, nothing is wrong that is true; no evil is so great as concealment. I do not wish to encourage despair, but I wish to avoid deceit. I must

oppose this system of delusion that has so long been practised upon the country. Do we want an example? Let us look to the Bank. The Bank were trustees for others; they forgot their situation; they trusted to the promises of the right honorable gentleman, and they made large advances to him. We see how it has fared with them, and so will it fare with this house, if we go on confiding as we have done. Whether the minister was deceived himself, or whether he deceived the Bank, will be a subject of future enquiry; but enough has already been laid before us at present, to enable us to come to this conclusion, that we must withhold all farther confidence from him. There is another point of view of the subject in which I am aware that an attempt to bring the house to vote that no farther advances shall be made to the Emperor may be said to lead to the worst effect, that of retarding peace. As a measure of war, we have a right to say to the Emperor that we have done all we can. We have not given our last guinea only, but our honor. We have a right to desire him to call upon his own subjects. But it may be said that without considering the measure with a view to the continuance of the war, in what state are we putting any possible negotiation for peace? Will it not induce France to offer terms which she would not have offered, if we had furnished the Emperor with the assistance required? I think it would produce an effect directly contrary. I am persuaded that if one thing could give more delight to France than another, it would be the knowledge that the commons of England have resolved to persevere in the present ruinous system. The French would not then care whether the Emperor's troops carried on offensive or defensive war; they would not then value the loss of this or that portion of territory; they would console themselves with the reflection, that this proceeding of the commons was, perhaps, slowly, but surely, sapping and undermining the pillars of the public credit of Great

Britain; and they would see the certainty of making a conquest of us. In the event, therefore, of any negotiation (which I do not expect under the present minister—which is neither practicable with him, nor could be successful), I see that the effect that would be produced would be directly contrary to that which has been predicted.

With regard to the general safety of this country, admitting our credit to be restored, I should despair as little as any man; but I fear that some among us think, that our apprehension about public credit is ill-founded, and that if we get into the system of the French, and rely upon paper, we shall be an overmatch for them. If there is to be no regard to public credit, and national faith; if there is to be no dread of a national bankruptcy—if “perish commerce, perish credit,” be the determination of gentlemen, I will not pretend to prophesy the result; but the feelings of the nation are, I believe, against such a scheme. If we were to fall in some other mode of warfare, there would be some dignity in our fall; but, in the present state, it has a meanness and disgrace in it; but should we even fall in the endeavor to keep up the national honor, by endeavoring to preserve the public faith, we shall fall with dignity, and we shall expire with something like an enviable glory. As long as we are just to the people, so long shall we retain their affections; and I am confident that if the trial were really to be made, whether this country^s should be a province of France, there would be but one heart; and, in the language of the best living poet, we shall exclaim:

“England, with all thy faults, I love thee still.”

The statement which I have laid before the house, may be said to be more gloomy than circumstances warrant. I shall be glad to have it proved so; but at present I am inclined to think that I have erred on the contrary side; nay, so convinced am I of it, that I am ready to say, without farther information,

taking the authorities we have, and reasoning upon what we know, that I would not give one guinea more to the Emperor. Sir, I cannot but think, that after what we have seen, we are placed in a more responsible situation with respect to our constituents; though the Bank, therefore, forgot the persons whom they represented, let us not follow their example. We have heard strange doctrines maintained of late. We have heard "that the people have nothing to do with the laws, but to obey them;" and it has been said, "that the parliament belongs to the King and not to the people." I hope we shall not hear, in the present case, that the King's honor is not engaged for another loan to the Emperor, and that we, being the King's parliament, must fulfil his engagements. Sir, I care not for the authority by which such doctrines are maintained; they are the doctrines of pride, ignorance, and presumption, (*Hear! Hear!*) and the more solemn the place where they are uttered, and the more sacred the function of the man from whom they proceed, the more libellous and treasonable are they in their nature. (*Hear! Hear!*) Sir, you know that we are bound to give advice to the King. You know that if any member dared to introduce the King's name to influence any debate, you would immediately call him to order. We need not be told, that there is a suspicion abroad, of our looking too much to the crown, and too little to the people. We are not ignorant that all who have places under the crown, become so immediately suspected, that they must go again to the people to know, whether they have, or have not, by the acceptance of such places, forfeited their confidence. I do hope we shall on this day shew that we belong to, and are responsible to the people; for if we persevere in the course that we have pursued, we shall not deserve to be called the King's parliament, but the parliament of the Emperor; not the parliament of the King of Great Britain, but of the house of

Austria. I have said that I am prepared to vote that not a guinea more be furnished to his Imperial Majesty, and that we extend no farther aid to him; but I am ready to refer to the judgment of others. Some have said that there is information depending which will enable us to take a wider view of the subject. I have, therefore, so far accommodated my motion as not to move any precise resolution, but to make a proposition which, I should hope, will meet with almost unanimous concurrence; for whether gentlemen think the war just or necessary, or wise and practicable, yet there is not one man here, I am persuaded, who will not agree with me, that the risk we run is greater than any possible benefit we can derive from it. I move, Sir, "That the house will resolve itself into a committee of the whole house, to enquire whether it is consistent with a due regard to the essential interests of this country, that under the present circumstances, any farther loans or advances should be made to his Imperial Majesty."

Mr. Pitt replied to Mr. Sheridan, and Mr. Fox supported the motion.

Mr. Sheridan said, that were he disposed to reply at any great length to the right honorable gentleman's (Mr. Pitt's) speech, that attempt on his part had been rendered perfectly useless by the able and complete answer of his right honorable friend.—He, therefore, only rose in order to solicit some explanation on points where he imagined he was somewhat unfairly dealt with by the right honorable gentleman. He unquestionably understood that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had given him a pledge that he would make the object of the present motion a separate and distinct question, and that he would himself bring it forward before a committee of supply, and give it, as far as depended on him, a fair, full, and satisfactory discussion. But without the most distant insinuation of any thing uncivil and

impolite, might he not be permitted to ask, what security the right honorable gentleman was prepared to give, that he would bring forward the discussion he had thus so solemnly promised? Did not the right honorable gentleman promise the governor and directors of the Bank, that no farther loans should be made for the Emperor? Did he keep that promise? No! And now that he makes a promise to the house with the same emphasis and solemnity, what assurance have the house that the promise shall be more faithfully adhered to? The language which such a conduct might justify, it was not his wish to adopt; he was not prepared to assert that the right honorable gentleman would not keep his word; he would only venture to say, that it was very possible he might change his mind; and, if so, what penalty is he to incur? He has bound himself not to make any farther advances to the Emperor, without previously communicating such intention to the house. But has he not done so already? and what was the censure passed by the house on that unconstitutional transaction? Did not the house resolve, that it should not be drawn into a precedent; and that nothing could have justified it but the urgency of the case, by which he was justified in that instance? But may not the right honorable gentleman hold out again a similar pressure, and on the plea of the special necessity of the case, come again for an indemnity to the house? He is now, as he says, willing and ready to discuss the propriety of farther advances.—Was he so last year, when of his own accord, he clandestinely sent money abroad without condescending to solicit the opinion or consent of parliament? The great stress of the right honorable gentleman's arguments rested on one point, that we wished to compel the Emperor to a separate peace, and the dangers that would arise from the loss of his co-operation. The right honorable gentleman had also accused him of not being over fond of speaking very respectfully of per-

sons in the Emperor's situation. Mr. Sheridan confessed, that he never felt inclined to lavish panegyric on crowned heads.—Unfortunately for themselves, and for their subjects, they had but too many flatterers, and he was not ambitious to add to the number. But if any thing disrespectful to the Emperor had been dropped on the present occasion, it most assuredly fell from the right honorable gentleman; it was he that libelled the Emperor! it was he that said, unless we continued our subsidies, his Imperial Majesty would withdraw his co-operation; it was he, therefore, who stigmatized that generous, that faithful ally, by supposing him to be a mere mercenary, pensioned Monarch, like any of the petty Princes of Germany. This was an aspersion never thrown on the Emperor's conduct by him (Mr. Sheridan), or those who generally voted and acted with him.

But what now might be the amount of the meditated loan for his Imperial Majesty? Was it one, two, three, five, or ten millions? Last year there was remitted to him one million and a half; and are we now to say, that unless we give a million and a half to the Emperor, he will immediately make a separate peace? Surely, so paltry a consideration could never induce him to relinquish a contest that was never undertaken for the support of religion, of justice, for the maintenance, nay, the very existence, of social order! He would surely rather make some sacrifice for his subjects; endeavor to inspire them with that enthusiasm which animated the French; and seek some other resources more suitable to his situation. But if we were to grant him but a small sum, that small sum will be of little service; and if a large sum, then the largeness of the sum, and the expectation of more, might operate as a temptation for the continuance of the war. It was not from the interference of the Archduke Charles, or of Buonaparte, that we were to expect the termination of hostilities. The Archduke might be eager

to repair, or at least to maintain, the military character of Austria; nor might it be unalluring to him to contest the laurel of victory with a great and distinguished rival in marshal fame; let this be as it may, sure he was, that as long as England could pay, Germany would not refuse to fight. Then where were our hopes of peace? Mr. Sheridan then compared the relative loss sustained by England and Germany during the course of the war, and he wished that this comparison might be held up by an honest minister of this country to an honest agent on the part of the Emperor. That comparison would shew, that if the one had served us by a powerful continental diversion, we had purchased that service by the loss of our national credit. Indeed, if we entered into that calamitous calculation, it would not appear that his Imperial Majesty lost more men than we did.

But, on the contrary, that our losses were equal—that it was ducat for ducat—brave for brave—widow for widow. If that friendly expostulation were made to the Emperor, he must have confessed that we have already contributed our full share of calamity. When to this we might add, that we have to contend against the combined fleets of Spain, Holland and France, it would be also just for that agent to come to this conclusion, that Austria had rendered comparatively but little, and we the greatest service to the cause. Nor would he like to see our ministers break faith with the public creditor: he would be but little inclined to trust or continue any alliance with those who were not faithful to their engagements with their own subjects: for it was reasonable to expect that we should be just at home, before we could do justice to others. But to all these considerations the right honorable gentleman did not think proper to advert. He ran from subject to subject, and dilated one vast variety of matter foreign to the question, promising us, however, a terrible fine speech on a future occasion, in

which he would, doubtless, be equally variegated and equally inclined to lead us agreeably astray in a blossomed wilderness of rhetoric.

The house divided on Mr. Sheridan's motion; ayes 87; noes 266.

APRIL 26.

SUPPLY.

A discussion arose on the misapplication of a sum of money by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which had been specifically granted for repaying advances made by the Bank.

Mr. SHERIDAN thought the distinction taken not worth dwelling upon. The money was given by the house for the purpose of paying the Bank, and the minister failing in this, had obtained it under false pretences. As the report of the committee of finance had been the subject of some animadversion, he should say a few words on this point. The right honorable gentleman had misrepresented what he had said upon this report on a former occasion. He had said, that he considered himself responsible for every part of it against which he had not dissented. He believed there was no material fallacy in the report. The instructions under which they acted, however, had prevented them from proceeding entirely in the manner which his right honorable friend had justly preferred. He should now only say a single word on the taxes; for it was the custom of the right honorable gentleman to consider the taxes as unanimously assented to, if they were received with no marks of disapprobation on their first introduction. In no part of his speech had the right honorable gentleman fully met our situation, and many of the taxes proposed he thought highly exceptionable.— They were as frivolous and vexatious as they would prove oppressive and unproductive. They also carried with them this additional calamity, as was truly observed by his right honorable friend (Mr. Fox),

that they would not answer the views of the minister, who would soon be obliged to lay on the shoulders of the people an equal or greater load of fresh taxes. To that on plate alone he had no objection. That on tolls was inconsistent with every idea of property and justice; and the tax on newspapers he could not but regard as a vital blow struck at the liberty of the press, in the only manner by which a minister could dare to aim it, by putting the information conveyed in them at a price beyond the reach of the majority of the public.

The newspapers were denominated a luxury, but was the dismal catalogue of miseries and distress which they now almost constantly contained, a luxury to those by whom they were read? The tax proposed went ultimately to the annihilation of cheap publications, for the instruction or information of the public. It was not surprising, however, that such ministers as the present should be desirous by any means to impose a check on their progress, or completely to accomplish their destruction.

A division took place on the resolution respecting newspapers, at the desire of Mr. Sheridan.—For the resolution 151; against it 43,

MAY 8.

MUTINY IN THE CHANNEL FLEET, AND AUGMENTATION OF THE PAY OF THE NAVY.

On this day the estimates were taken into consideration, for the purpose of augmenting the pay of the seamen, in consequence of the mutiny which had broken out in the Channel fleet. Previously to stating them, Mr. Pitt expressed much repugnance to detail, as usual, the motives on which he founded the necessity of applying to the house for an addition to the public expenditure.—He declared, that, on the present occasion, he did not find himself at liberty to enter into a detail of the transactions that led him to apply. They were such that he felt himself obliged to say, that he would trust their judgment would induce them to concur in his motion, without making it the subject of a long discussion; nor was he able to enter into a statement of the events that had more recently happened; and if he were, he should feel a reluctance in doing it, as they were wholly, or in a great degree, to be ascribed to misrepre-

sentations. To silence these, and to appease at once all discontent, nothing, in his opinion, would be so effectual as the unanimous decision of parliament on the proposal before them. He, therefore, thought it his duty to entreat the house to pass their silent judgment on the present case, while they coincided with the motion it occasioned him to make. He then moved for a total of £436,000 to answer the additional pay and allowances to the seamen and marines in the navy. The resolutions, to this intent, being read,

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he certainly should vote for the resolution, but there was a question he should propose to the right honorable gentleman which might be answered without involving that discussion which he wished to avoid, or that mischief which he apprehended. In allusion to the new disturbances which were said to exist, the right honorable gentleman had said that nothing was so likely to restore tranquillity as an immediate vote in favor of the resolution. But why then did not the right honorable gentleman avail himself of the opportunity of submitting that vote sooner when it might have prevented the disturbances it was to appease? Why was it that the vote was to be proposed when information was received that new disturbances had broken out? Why did he not take immediate steps in consequence of the promises which were made? Why, instead of the slow and procrastinating mode that had been followed, had not the right honorable gentleman come with a message from the throne, recommending the house to take measures to carry into effect what had been done? He distinctly asked then why a fortnight's delay had taken place before any steps were adopted to carry into effect what had been done? How could they rely that even what they were to vote would be properly carried into effect? From the words of the lords of the Admiralty, that they had come to the resolution of acceding to the demands of the seamen, "that they might have as early an opportunity as possible of returning to their duty, as it may be necessary that the fleet should speedily put to sea to meet the enemy of the country," it was

plain that they did not expect that the seamen were to return to their duty upon that promise; but that some other proceedings would immediately follow upon it. 'The first step, then, ought to have been a communication to the house, and such a vote as this, passed with unanimity, would have perfectly satisfied them. He thought too highly of the character of British seamen, to imagine that this vote would not satisfy them; and if it did not, he should think more degradingly of them than he did at present. Misrepresentations might have induced them to do what they ought not to have done; but the right honorable gentleman ought to have prevented the possibility of such misrepresentation. He was convinced, however, that means of conciliation would be more effectual if accompanied with a vote of censure on ministers, for not coming to parliament sooner with some proposition on the subject.

Mr. Pitt said, it was a mistake to imagine that the proposition had been brought forward in consequence of any new occurrences.

Mr. Sheridan said, that he did not state that the resolution was now brought forward in consequence of recent occurrences. He charged the right honorable gentleman with the delay that had taken place. He believed that misrepresentation might have taken place, but, that misrepresentation ought to have been anticipated by some earlier proposition on the subject. He pressed the right honorable gentleman to inform the house, what motive, what reason, what pretence, could exist for the delay of a fortnight which had intervened? He did not impute any responsibility to the Admiralty, as they had done all they could do.

The resolutions passed nem. con.

MAY 9.

MUTINY IN THE CHANNEL FLEET, &c.

On this day, the charge against ministers of procrastination was renewed by Mr. Whitbread, who declared, that it appeared to him

of such consequence, that he considered it his duty formally to enquire, why ministry had not, at an earlier period, applied to the house, and thereby prevented the dangers that had resulted from this neglect. The answer of Mr. Pitt was, that every proper step had been adopted to obviate the unhappy event which had taken place. Mr. Fox justified the censure, which he trusted the house would pass on administration.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he was confident that not a doubt remained in the mind of any gentleman in the house of the shameful misconduct of His Majesty's ministers; nor had he any doubt but that they all felt regret at what had happened, and indignation at those who were the cause of it, as well as contempt for their incapacity. He should himself, if his honorable friend had not given notice of it, have brought forward an immediate censure upon the King's ministers for having delayed this measure, but that he wished that nothing should now stand in the way of passing the bill. The reason, which the minister offered as an apology for the delay that had taken place, was not to be endured, under the circumstances of the time. The minister now pretended to say, that he waited for an estimate of the expense which will attend this measure. Did he really believe that the public were to be so insulted? He could have brought this estimate down to the house at the very hour after the King's proclamation was issued. He was ready enough to avoid all delay in granting the imperial loan; nay, so anxious was he upon that measure, that he would not wait for three days, although it was notorious that intelligence was expected to arrive which would put that loan out of the question. He was ready enough, also, to use all due diligence to stop the payment of the Bank, and to cause the King to come to town at an unusual hour, and in the most extraordinary way, in order to issue the order of council for that purpose. But he saw nothing in this measure—upon which the very existence of the nation depended—that required haste. This was such shameful neglect, that he trusted the

house would feel it, as he was sure the public felt it, with abhorrence. The minister was absolutely without excuse for the delay that had taken place : he knew that the sailors were dissatisfied. He now came forward with his unavailing regret that any disturbances had happened ; he pretended that they arose from misunderstanding. Could there be any wonder at that misunderstanding ? Had the sailors not a promise from the Admiralty, and was not that promise afterwards treated with apparent indifference by the King's ministers ? Did they not delay the measure which could alone give it sanction ? Had they, therefore, no reason for doubting the sincerity of the minister ? It was true, indeed, that in most cases where money was to be called from the people, the minister's promise was precisely the same thing as a vote of the house of commons,—at least there was reason for thinking so from former facts ; but it was not wonderful that the sailors thought otherwise ; for they judged more of what parliament ought to be, than what it really was by its modern practice ; and, therefore, unless the minister had lost his very superior intellects, it was impossible for him not to foresee the consequences that followed. He could not but foresee, that when the order was given for the fleet to weigh anchor, that jealousy would remain among the sailors ; and, therefore, he was to all intents and purposes answerable for the consequences that ensued.

With respect to the notice of his honorable friend, he hoped he would not pursue it this day, because the minister might complain of the want of candour in bringing such a matter forward on a sudden ; for that there could be no reason, but there was no necessity for giving him the pretext ; and the more opportunity that was given to him to prepare himself the better, and he hoped he would prepare a much better defence than any he had hitherto urged. He ought, however, to give to the house

some account of what he expected to be the feeling of the sailors when this measure should pass, in order that the house might have satisfaction in what they were doing. Be the claims of the sailors what they may, what was now proposed to be granted to them was nothing more than justice: at the same time that he said this, he must not omit to state distinctly his decided disapprobation of the mode in which these demands were insisted upon; it was unfair, and inconsistent with the brave, generous, and open character of British seamen; nor had he a doubt but there had been a foul interference with them, and means of the basest nature used, to induce them to take the steps which they had taken. If men were oppressed, they ought to be relieved by their country; but, however just their complaints were, they ought to complain in a regular way. If there were men among them, as he believed there were, that advised the sailors to put their country into such peril as it stood in at this moment, for the mere purpose of having their objects carried, such men were the most base of traitors. He suspected there were persons of this description, and the evil was of the most alarming kind, when the enemy were actually preparing in the most formidable manner against us. He thought, that listening to the suggestions of such foes to this country, would never have been the fault of the brave British seamen. The country were to look to the ministers for the great cause of all this; and we were now in a situation in which common measures would not do, and therefore he should have to propose one of an uncommon kind. If he were told, that by proposing it, he encroached on executive government, he should answer, that executive government had encroached upon the representative part already so much, as to make his measure absolutely necessary. He thought, that the sailors had such a distrust in the promises of the executive government;—and perhaps they might not have sufficient faith in the

pledge of that house. They had evidently shewn they had no faith in those who had hitherto negotiated with them, if accounts were true, as he was afraid they were; for it appeared by them that when the town was lulled yesterday into a sanguine hope that the disturbances were over, and that the London had sailed down to St. Helen's, and that Admiral Colpoys was gone with her, the delegates went on shore to view the dead bodies of those who fell in the scuffle. If this be true, as he feared it was, he would ask what was to be done with the fleet? What measure was to be taken? Had any been taken to prevent future mischief? Any thing to prevent the most horrid of all calamities? He believed none. This was a single instance, and a fresh one, of the deplorable incapacity of the present minister in this critical conjuncture. By their criminal and murderous delay, they had brought on this dreadful evil; at their door should be laid the blood that had been shed upon this occasion: and yet, after all this, the right honorable gentleman came to the house, and asked for confidence, as if nothing was the matter. He gave no answer to any question put to him, but desired the house to pass the whole matter by in silence. He said, he really did not wish to give way to his feelings, and therefore he should endeavour to restrain himself. What would be the effect if the house followed the example set before them by the minister? A sullen silence was to be observed. What would the inference be which the sailors would draw from this?—Why, that the parliament had passed this measure unwillingly, because an advantage had been taken of it, and in which they were not sincere, and which they would, therefore, abandon as soon as they had an opportunity of doing so. He hoped, therefore, that it would be expressed as the general sentiments of the house, that they did give and grant this, as the real right of the British navy; but if it was given in that

sullen, silent manner, which the minister proposed, it would not be giving to the sailors the security they desire. It was a curious thing to see the minister, whose negligence brought on this evil, holding in his own hand the helm of the vessel, which, by his piloting, had been steering among the rocks, tell the sailors, "hold your tongues, let not a word be spoken; I will bring you safe through all your dangers; and, as a proof that I will do so, I am the person who brought you into them." His own incapacity was the ground on which he called for future confidence. He thought, therefore, that if the other house was sitting, that the house of commons ought to send it a message to desire their immediate concurrence to the appointment of a committee, consisting of a small number of the members of each house. It could not be a question on which any party feelings could operate; on this question there could be but one feeling; he should therefore propose that a joint committee be appointed—to have power to send for persons and papers—to sit from time to time, and to adjourn from place to place as occasion might require, and there could be no difficulty as to the spot where they ought to be, and that they should proceed without any adjournment above eight hours from time to time, and commence without delay. He felt that this was the only measure by which we could extricate ourselves from this horrid calamity.

Mr. Whitbread postponed his motion till the following day.

Mr. Sheridan said, he had given notice that he should move for a committee. The minister had chosen to misunderstand his meaning, for he had said that he should propose that they should have power to send for persons and papers, and to adjourn from time to time, and from place to place. Did the minister mean to say, that it would be improper for such a committee to correspond with the

sailors? Had not executive government corresponded with them already? Were not the sailors, to say no worse, in a state of insubordination at this moment? Would he say there was danger in inquiring into our situation? He knew not what the minister would say; he regretted to learn that the minister was to oppose his motion, but he should at all events make it.

MAY 23.

MUTINY IN THE NAVY.

Mr. SHERIDAN. I rise to give notice of my intention to bring forward to-morrow, a motion upon a subject of considerable importance. There has been, every gentleman will recollect, a great difference of opinion respecting the manner in which we should proceed with respect to the navy. Some gentleman conceived, that the measures to be adopted ought to be adopted in perfect silence; others, among whom I was, thought the contrary; I was clearly of opinion, that if silence had been observed, it might have been construed into a sullenness, and, perhaps, into a degree of unwillingness on our part. But though the sentiments of gentlemen might differ upon that point, there is, I am sure, but one opinion, that the foulest misrepresentations have been made of what was said in the debate. I have seen a copy of a gross libel, which affects to be the manifesto of the sailors. I believe it to be a forgery, and I think it could be proved to be so from internal evidence. As far as it affects me personally, I should not have thought it worth attending to; but as it is with such industry circulated in all our ports as genuine, I hold it to be my duty to submit the subject to the house to-morrow, when I shall state more fully the motion which it is my intention to make.

MAY 26.

MUTINY IN THE NAVY.

Mr. SHERIDAN. Sir, I now rise to address the house on a subject, in my opinion, as important as any of those which have of late occupied our attention; a subject which is, in my humble opinion, in comparison of all others, deserving the most serious consideration and attention. Sir, I believe the idea which this house has formed of the motion, I expressed my intention to make, has been founded on a mistaken notion. Many supposed, I have no doubt, that I merely meant to complain of a paper, containing a gross misrepresentation, with respect to the navy; also something of a personal nature, immediately referring to myself. My opinion, Sir, of the liberty of the press, and the advantage we derive from it is such, that I should be sorry that any provocation to myself individually, should induce me to desire the interposition of the house, in any manner, against the proprietors and printers of the newspapers, who have inserted the paper of which I complain. On the contrary, Sir, the proposition I had to make was of a consolatory nature. I do not retract in the smallest degree from that opinion which I expressed upon a former occasion, that the perseverance of the seamen in a state of insubordination, after their demands had been complied with, must have been owing to misrepresentations and falsehoods circulated among them. That there should be men in the country capable of employing such misrepresentations and falsehoods, is a matter much to be lamented: but there is something consolatory in the reflection, that the mischief is not in the minds of the seamen themselves, but is the consequence of the arts and delusions which have been practised upon them. Sir, I hold in my hand a paper, which has been circulated with great industry among the seamen. It is a paper purporting to be an appeal to the British nation from the seamen on board Lord Bridport's fleet. This has

been sent to Plymouth and Sheerness, where it has been circulated with the most fatal success. Sir, I did on a former day, take the liberty of saying, that this paper, from the internal evidence it carries with it, could not be the composition of the delegates of Lord Bridport's fleet; I am still of the same opinion. Yet, I confess there are certain circumstances of apparent authenticity about it, that I am not at all surprised the printers and proprietors of newspapers should have been imposed upon, and led to believe it authentic; and I have no hesitation in saying, I do firmly believe the seamen among whom this paper has been circulated, believe it to be the proclamation of the delegates of Lord Bridport's fleet; and that they were well founded in point of fact, in the assertion that their grievances remained unredressed; I am, therefore, not surprised that they should have remained in a state of insubordination. The paper in question was printed at Portsmouth, by the printer who had been employed by the delegates, and the manuscript was brought to him from on board the fleet. If it was brought by the delegates themselves, they must have been grossly imposed upon; for throughout the whole of the paper, it is evident, that it does not express the sentiments of British seamen. The language in which it is drawn up, is more like the language of a circulating library, than that of a fore-castle. It is no more the production of a British seaman, than a British seaman is the enemy of his country. This paper purports to be an appeal to "A Loyal and Discerning Nation." It states the whole of the transactions which have taken place, and asserts, that notwithstanding His Majesty's most gracious pardon, it was the intention of His Majesty's ministers to select and execute the seamen who were the principal ringleaders. It states, that schemes were laid out to sacrifice some of the brightest gems that ever adorned this or any other country; and

that no sooner was that pardon granted, but in direct contradiction to it, were individuals selected for the express purpose of sacrificing them to malice and private resentment. Now, Sir, when a paper of this description is circulated with avidity round our coasts, is it not fit that a clear contradiction should be given to it?—Is it not necessary that a paper which has manifestly imposed on the understandings of British seamen should be cleared up to them, and its falsehoods detected? With respect, Sir, to the calumny itself, it would be an insult to the understanding of the house, if I should suppose a doubt existed respecting it. I am no friend to His Majesty's ministers; on the contrary, I think there is not a more determined irreconcilable and inflexible enemy to them and their system than myself; but to insinuate that they or any one of them could have possibly harboured such a thought, as that imputed to them by this manifesto; that any one of them could have had such an intention after the pardon granted by His Majesty to the seamen—If I could insinuate this, I should deem myself not merely an enemy to His Majesty's ministers, but of the country. Sir, I cannot be suspected of complimenting the house of commons; I have differed from them on almost all occasions; yet, I think I may say, that with respect to good will towards British seamen, its sentiments has never been different from my own. If ever man loved man—if ever one part of the people loved another, the people of this country love the seamen. The individuals of this house have ever loved the seamen, and in this respect have shewn themselves the representatives of the people. Whatever has been at any period proposed in this house, for the benefit of the seamen, has been adopted; not only with readiness, but almost with acclamation. A right honorable gentleman, whom I do not now see in his place, (Mr. Dundas) has, on many occasions, brought questions before this house, for the

advantage of the seamen, which had been acquiesced in with the same satisfaction they were proposed.

With respect to that part of the publication which relates to myself, I have but to recur to the style of it, in order to convince the house it never was the composition of British seamen. It runs, "Oh! Sheridan, Sheridan! if this be your mean opinion of British seamen, thou knowest very little, very little of seamen's sentiments." Sir, I certainly did say, if they remained dissatisfied after their request had been granted, and at a time too when the fleet of the enemy might be at sea—I did say, if, after their demands were satisfied, they remained in port endangering by such conduct the safety of the British empire, that it must be because they were worked upon, and their judgment misled by a species of the foulest and basest treachery. The paper states farther, "What, accuse us of treachery, impute treachery to us! its principles we disavow."—Sir, I appeal to the candor of any man, whether it was, in the remotest degree, accusing the seamen of treachery, when I said they must be the objects of that treachery, which had been the cause of their delusion, if they continued dissatisfied after their demands were complied with? They could not have selected any individual on whom to make a charge of such a nature who so little deserved it. Sir, with respect to another observation in the same paper, "that the right hon. gentleman, thinking he had defeated the Chancellor, attacked the poor but loyal tars," it is equally inapplicable to me. I wish the former part were true; I wish to God I had defeated the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Sir, I cannot instance a greater proof of my endeavors to promote the advantage of the seamen, than that in the year 1786, in the 7th session of the then parliament, a gentleman did twice bring a bill before the house, which I afterwards renewed for the general benefit of seamen: and though the principles of

such bills were objected to, it did happen they had for their object the redress of those grievances which have of late been the subject of complaint. Sir, I have ever been their friend, but never more so than at this period in warning them against those artifices which have been practised to seduce them. When people tell them that the navy can be managed without subordination, they may as well tell them a ship can be managed without a rudder; they had better pull down the masts and the shrouds, and lay them on the deck, than listen to such representation. At the same time, Sir, it should be understood that there are no farther grievances, if any exist, which we will not redress. It was my intention to have proposed to the consideration and adoption of the house, a motion of a consolatary nature; yet, from what I have heard upon the subject, I am convinced His Majesty's ministers can have but one wish on the subject, namely, to restore harmony in our navy, which has been so unhappily interrupted. I shall not press my motion: I thought it necessary to make those few observations, that an opportunity might be given of contradicting the contents of a paper evidently circulated with the worst intentions.

Mr. Pitt complimented Mr. Sheridan for the fair, candid, and liberal conduct he had adopted in this business.

MR. GREY'S MOTION FOR A REFORM IN PARLIAMENT.

Mr. Grey, in pursuance of previous notice, rose this day to move for a reform in the representation of the people. He proposed that the county representation should remain nearly on the same footing; only, that instead of 92 county members, there should be 113. For instance, instead of two for the county of York, there should be two for each riding; and so in other counties, where the present representation was not proportionate to the extent of population. In order to put an end to compromises, each county, or riding, should be divided into grand divisions, each of which should return one representative. With regard to the qualifications of electors, instead of confining the right of election to freeholders, it should be extended to copyholders and leaseholders, who were bound to pay a certain annual rent,

a certain number of years. But the reform which he had to propose, in the other branch of representation, was of a much more extensive nature. It was, that the remaining four hundred members should be returned by one description of persons, which were householders. If it were possible, one person should not be permitted to vote for more than one member of parliament. In order to prevent expense, the poll ought to be taken throughout the whole kingdom at one time. This was the outline of the plan. Mr. Grey concluded his speech, by moving for leave to bring in a bill to amend the representation of the people in the house of commons. Mr. Erskine seconded the motion. Mr. Pitt, Lord Hawkesbury, and others, opposed it.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he had listened with great attention to the speech of the noble lord (Hawkesbury) who had just sat down. A speech which was remarkable for its eloquence, and as remarkable for its steady opposition *in limine*, against all reform of all kinds, that it might as well be called a speech for a revolution as much as against reform. He should have commended it the more if it came from a quarter in which he could confide, and rest secure that the boldness of it would be followed up in the hour of attack; but when he reflected that it came from the same quarter as the sentiments that had been uttered against France, that we were to pursue a *bellum internecinum*; that we were engaged in the cause of law, of civil order, of humanity, of religion; and reflected on what part had been taken in the same quarter, and knew that these very persons who thus talked boldly and sturdily, would afterwards, in the hour of real peril, be ready to crawl upon their knees and lick the blood off the feet of these regicides—when he contrasted this blustering language with the real spirit of those who uttered it, he was sure, that if these same persons should enter into a *bellum internecinum* with the reformers of England, they might be made as humble with regard to them as they had shewn themselves towards the French. He therefore was not surprized to hear the noble lord so bold in his speech against the reformers; but this assertion, that the parliament is now more popular than ever, was going a little farther than any other man had ever

done before. He liked the manner in which the noble lord proved, as he called it, the truth of that assertion; he stated the merits of Mr. Grenville's bill. It was an excellent regulation with respect to contested elections. How was it excellent? by taking away altogether from the house of commons the right of determining on the merits of contested elections; by shewing that the house of commons could not, as men of honour, be trusted with the decision of such a matter as a contested election; that they had given in false verdicts upon that matter frequently, and therefore ought to have that power no longer; that therefore an act of Parliament was necessary to take away their power, because they had acted dishonorably; this was the noble lord's proof that there was no necessity for a reform in parliament. His next proof of the purity of parliament, and of the popularity of its present proceedings, was also curious. Some close boroughs, it seemed, had been thrown open; Cricklade and Shoreham, and one or two others, were thrown into the general mass of representation; and this was another proof that there was no necessity for a parliamentary reform. What did this motion go to? Why, to make this, which, in the opinion of the noble lord, was an excellent measure, in these few instances, a general measure. These two or three little instances were, in the opinion of the noble lord, a great acquisition to the people, but the making the measure general would be a great evil. But the question was now boldly put, where did the people see their grievances? They saw them in the extension of the excise laws. They saw them in the restraint that was put upon their speeches to each other. They saw them in the erection of barracks all over the kingdom. They saw them in the votes of the house of commons, by which their money was squandered upon objects that were never defined. They saw them in the money that was sent away to the continent without the consent, or

even knowledge of parliament. Put these grievances into one side of the scale, and the little acquisitions of Mr. Grenville's bill, and the throwing open of a few paltry boroughs into the other, and he believed the noble lord himself, although by no means a bashful man in that house, would be ashamed to hold the balance. The noble lord dwelt a great deal on what he considered as a very powerful argument, namely, that as there was a contrariety of opinion as to the plan of a parliamentary reform, that must be considered as a proof that the evil did not exist; for that if it did, there would have been no difficulty about the remedy, that it must be clear. This reminded him of the adage, "When doctors differ, &c." If that was to be the answer, it would follow, that if doctors differ as to the remedy, the patient, although he may appear to be dying, must be taken to be in perfect health. He knew not where the noble lord had studied his logic, but certain it was not from the College of Physicians. There was one part of the complaint which never occurred to the noble lord. He touched upon the landed interest; he touched upon the interest of the boroughs; and most logically concluded, that there was no complaint against either: but it never entered into his mind that the minister would have too much interest with them all when assembled in the house of commons. Here he was reminded by the words of a person whom it was hardly regular for him to quote, as a reverend prelate, who had said that the parliament belongs to the crown. If that be so, he would say that he would not debate the remedy whatever it be, for he was ready to say that the house of commons would be better in any hands than in the hands of the crown. But the noble lord had said, "Shew me that the close boroughs have done more harm than popular places." He did not know what the noble lord meant by harm. He could shew him that the proprietors of these close boroughs had acted on a

system which must be cut up by the roots, or this country cannot stand. He would say that they had bought boroughs, and afterwards voted away the money and the rights of the people, as if both had been their own absolute property. That there had been a man in that house who had seven or eight seats in it ; that he was connected with the minister, and that, without one foot of land in Ireland, he was made an Irish peer. He could shew him persons who could not, indeed, buy men and sell them, because that was not yet to be done, but who bought and sold boroughs, and with them sold the dearest interests of the people. The noble lord, in part of his speech, put the close boroughs out of the question ; indeed he would have acted judiciously in never taking notice of them, for they could not be of any service to his argument. But it seemed that ministers had met with support in the counties. He knew they had ; and it was a thing to be much lamented, that men of large wealth should quit the nearest and dearest connections they had for the purpose of following the dictates of a profligate minister ; and before any justice could be done to that part of the case, the noble lord must have counted all the coronets that have been given away by the present minister. Men who voted away all public principle for favors of this kind, were the most profligate and contemptible characters in the kingdom. What if a county member knows that his name is entered in the pocket-book of the Secretary of the Treasury as a person to be called to the other house, and votes any thing that is desired of him in order to obtain that distinction—he knew many of that description. These were called men of honor, but they were the reverse of it, they were enemies to the nation in which they lived. They pretended to vote for the cause of justice, and humanity, and religion, when in point of fact they were only laughing at the public, and voting away their rights to serve their own ambition. That was a great reason why the people

called for a parliamentary reform. It was a conviction that most public men have nothing in view but their own personal advantage, was owing all the mischief that had lately happened to our service. It was upon that principle the sailors and the soldiers reasoned. The house would set them a better example by reforming parliament, if they had a spark of honor in them.

With regard to the question, as it had been argued by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, nothing was said upon the present representation of the people. The noble lord had fallen foul of all the doctrine which the Chancellor of the Exchequer had ever maintained upon reform, and he was sorry the Chancellor of the Exchequer had left the house; were he present, he most likely would have saved him a good deal of trouble in replying to many parts of the speech of the noble lord.

A good deal had been said about throwing the country into confusion. The minister and his advocates affected to dread the principle of the present measure, because it seemed to proceed upon the Rights of Man, and because they said they were principles which had been adopted in the French revolution, and which principles led to so much horror. In this respect, he must deny that the horrors of the French revolution were produced by the Rights of Man. There were bloody calamities in France after the French revolution; nobody disputed it; but that these calamities were produced by these principles he disputed. There was not so much as one individual who was concerned either in writing or publishing any of these principles, concerned in any of the massacres in that country; and here he must repeat what he said on former occasions, that excess of conduct was the natural effect of all revolutions when men shook off their slavery. When men are under the necessity of recovering their liberty by force, they are naturally intemperate. Man was not born to have property in men;

and if he persists in maintaining that he has, there is no wonder when he falls a victim to his own iniquity and presumption. This ought to be a lesson to us. If the question was put to him, who were the real authors and abettors of these massacres, he should place certain despots in the front of his accusation.

It was impossible for any thing to be more unjust than the view which the minister had thought fit to take of all the reformers to-night. He asked the public to look upon them all as so many masked traitors. He denied the justice of that description of them. That there might be among them some men of mischievous intentions, no man would dispute; and when was any great public measure proposed, in which some characters would not mingle, but that they were considerable either in number or talents, was what he did not believe. That he was no friend to such persons, but would, on the contrary, endeavour to detect them, he was entitled, by what he had said this day on another subject, to ask the house to believe. But when the minister took the whole complexion of a meeting from the intemperate speeches of a few intoxicated or superficial individuals, who might casually attend a public meeting, it proved, what he had already said of the minister, that he was ignorant of the nature of a popular assembly; how could he be otherwise? He never entered any assembly, except the house of commons, and that was the reason why he could not make a distinction between the honest intentions of the mass of a people, and the absurdities of a few.

But the minister had endeavoured to make a great deal of the difference that subsisted between the reformers; and he had said, that all that had been urged upon reform, when he was a party to it, was agreement itself compared to the discordance of late meetings. He thought that there was no harm in every man speaking openly what he thought upon the subject of parliamentary reform; he wished

every man's heart to be legible in these times of danger; ingenuous openness was always, and at all times, much better than concealment. He knew not why universal suffrage should have been brought into such contempt; he remembered at some meetings signing his name with the Duke of Richmond in favour of universal suffrage and annual parliaments. He considered it as the right of every man to propose that, if he thought fit; the expediency of such a plan, was matter for discussion and deliberation; if any other plan was better, there was no reason why it should not be preferred; but it seemed now to be treated as a species of treason; he confessed he knew not why, he was not at all ashamed of having signed it, there was no secrecy about the matter; it was published in all the newspapers: he thought this plan a better one; he thought also that the mass of the people would be satisfied with it: but every man who thought universal suffrage the best plan, must necessarily wish for anarchy and confusion, was a thing which he would not admit. Some men claimed popularity as well as other advantages from their rank; but they were deceived if they thought they could prosecute others for following their opinions without being despised by the public.

It had been stated, that the number of those who wished for a reform in parliament was small. He did not believe it. He believed that the whole body of dissenters wished for a reform without pulling down the fabric of the constitution. He believed, also, that the mass of the people of Scotland had the same wish; for at present the whole forty-five were returned by men who had some of them not an inch of land in that part of the island.

He was not much of an egotist, nor was he, out of that house, an arrogant man. He was almost ashamed of the praise the minister had bestowed upon

him to-day for merely doing his duty, when he spoke of the sailors. He hoped and he trusted, that much calamity as this country feels, we shall never bend our necks to an insolent foe ; but will, if necessary, to a man, defend our rights with our lives. He must be indulged to say another word about himself, as it was now necessary. He had been accused of wishing to join with those who wish for anarchy. He would ask those who charged him with so foul a wish, what temptation he had to do so? What provocation had he to excite any opposition against the aristocracy of this land, or against its monarchy? He had possessed at one time some confidence from the Monarch, during the time he filled an office of considerable trust. He had been honored with the confidence of an illustrious personage. He had been treated with civility by many of the first families in this country. He knew no occasion he had to regret the attention he had received from that house. He had no desire to break a lance with any orator in any other place. He, therefore, expected credit for sincerity when he declared, that he supported this motion from his heart, because he thought in his conscience it tended to restore to the people some of the purity of their original excellent constitution, and to save the state from ruin.

The house divided ; for the motion 93 ; against it 258.

MAY 30.

NEW BANK.

Sir William Pulteney moved for leave to bring in a bill for erecting a new bank, on the event of the Bank of England not resuming its payments on the 24th of June next.

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he had always desired to see public credit re-established in the person of the Bank ; and, therefore, he had hitherto opposed the ideas of the worthy Baronet upon that subject. But he did not find by the arguments he had heard, that any idea was entertained that the Bank was to re-

sume its payment in cash. He differed from the worthy baronet as to the first duty of the Bank. That honorable Member looked upon the Bank as having been instituted for the purpose chiefly of accommodating government. He wanted a public Bank that would proceed on the narrow ground of looking to itself, and to itself only; and he was persuaded, that until that was the case, there would be no such thing in this country as a paper circulation founded upon real credit. If the Bank did not open on the 24th of June, he saw no reason, from any thing that had been said to-night, for hoping that they would open at all. It was a farce to call that a Bank which was never to give for paper any thing but paper. It was admitted that the Bank had with great facility assisted government from time to time. Now if the Bank was to be considered as bound to continue that assistance, the distresses of the government must continue to be the distresses of the Bank. But he maintained that this was a practice which was against the general principle on which the Bank ought to act, and on which alone it ought to be supported. The Bank should say this—"We know nothing of the distresses of government, we look to the notes which we have issued, and we are determined to pay them when they become due." When we had an issue of paper, it was ridiculous to think of confidence in that paper upon any principle but that of its being paid when it became due. If the Bank was allowed to use any discretion in relieving the necessities of government in preference to paying the demands of individuals upon themselves, such a bank could never have the confidence of the public, and fatal inconvenience would soon arise; whereas, by separating the Bank from the government, this truth would soon appear—that it is owing to the war that all these difficulties have arisen. By taking it to be the duty of the Bank to assist government in all its distress, the Bank can never be reasonably

expected to open its payments in specie to its creditors; it must give paper for paper for ever; so that the Bank would have five per cent. for giving its opinion upon the solvency of government, and supposing them to owe ten millions upon their present paper, they would, in the course of fourteen years, by the operation of compound interest, realize to themselves the whole of that property: this was in reality giving nothing to the public creditor; and therefore, unless he heard that the Bank was to open payments in cash at some given time, he should be for opening another bank. With regard to the notes of the Bank, he did not expect them to be at a discount, even although the Bank should not pay in specie; for now that we should require annually the sum of twenty-six millions in the collection of taxes, that would keep them at par while they were received in payment at the Exchequer; for any man receiving a large sum in bank notes, might readily pass them to a distiller, or any other person, who had two or three hundred thousand pounds to pay to the revenue. Thus the load of our debt kept up the credit of our bank notes—where the system was to end it was not difficult to guess. He wished the Bank to resume a character for punctuality, and he wished to support it under that character; but as no hope had been given that such was to be the case, he was under the necessity of supporting the motion. He spoke of the plan of Mr. Hartsink in terms of great approbation, and said, that in his mind it promised to be very useful.

The house divided; for the motion 15; against it 50.

JUNE 1.

LOAN.

The report of the committee of ways and means being brought up, and the resolutions read, Sir John Sinclair said, he hoped the resolution for granting an additional bonus to the subscribers of the loyalty loan would not be carried into effect. He objected to it; first, be-

cause it was incompatible with the proceedings of parliament, in the early part of the session ; secondly, because it could not go beyond the resolution of a former committee ; and, thirdly, because he thought it ought to be grounded on a petition from the subscribers.

The Speaker informed him, that in regard to the first objection, the rule of the house was, that no two resolutions, nor any two bills contradictory to each other, could be passed in the same session. It remained for the house to decide, whether this resolution was contradictory, or only explanatory or supplementary, as in the latter instances, the honorable baronet's objections would not apply. In regard to the second objection, the honorable baronet did not appear to have understood the practice of the house, since a committee of ways and means, or the house, might approve any resolution for extending the grants of a former committee, with this exception, that no additional burdens could be imposed, except in the land-tax. And, in regard to the third objection, a petition might with propriety have been presented though not without a recommendation from the crown, but that did not preclude any other mode. This was a transaction between the public and an individual ; and if it was disadvantageous to the individual, it was not irregular to propose, that he should not be held to the original bargain. Here he had to observe, as a strong proof of the power to make such a proposition, that in case a petition was moved to be presented, and the crown refused its recommendation, it was in the power of any member afterwards to bring forward a motion to the same effect. The only objection, therefore, which admitted of doubt was the first ; and he left it to the decision of the house, whether this resolution was contradictory, or explanatory, or supplemental ?

Mr. SHERIDAN said, he listened with great deference to the opinion of the chair, and he assented to the statement given on two of the objections ; he thought, however, that the resolution was contradictory to former resolutions in this session of parliament, as it went to alter an agreement and bargain already made, and to make terms contrary to that bargain sanctioned by an act of parliament. Had it been attempted to take part of the profit from the contributors, would there have been no objection on the point of form ? He should be sorry, however, if the question were to be got rid of merely by a point of form ; for never was there a case of more rank depravity, or one that more strongly deserved the name of an iniquitous job, than this transaction. He hoped, that from the impression made out of doors, by the arguments against the measure, and

the comparative number of the division last night, that the right honorable gentleman would not have stood upon a point of form, but have explained the substantial merits on which he defends their measure. If it were consistent with regularity, he should wish to ask, whether there had been any promise or engagement with the contributors to the loan of eighteen millions, that there was to be no other loan for the year?

Sir John Sinclair waved the question of form; and Mr. Pitt observed, that on every ground of policy, he felt it to be his duty to bring forward and support this proposition. ¶

Mr. Sheridan observed, that, properly speaking, there were three parties to be considered in a loan. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, the subscribers to the loan, and the house of commons. Taking it in this view, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had deceived the original subscribers, and was now about to impose upon the house, and defraud the public. With respect to the eighteen millions' loan the subscribers might be taught to believe that there was not to be another loan, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer could not but know that there must be another loan, for at that very moment he knew there was a deficiency of seven millions. As to the merit of the subscribers to this loan, he was willing to give them full credit for their public spirit; but the measure of the Chancellor of the Exchequer made it a species of selfish public spirit, and a mercenary avaricious generosity. If they were left to bear the whole of this loss, they would be entitled to the character of patriots; but this measure took away all the grace of their public ardour. He observed also, that should it ever happen that this bargain might turn out profitable to the subscribers by the increase of the funds, there was no provision for the return of a single pound to the public of what was now proposed to be voted to those loyal money-lending gentlemen. Indeed it was quite ridiculous to pronounce any panegyrics on the loyalty and patriotism

of subscribers to loans. It was better, because honest, to confess that they come forward with a loan in expectation of profit. The minister knew this; he had by this loan lost much of his credit with the monied men; he wished to restore himself to their favor, and therefore he came now to the house to ask them to repair his credit out of the public purse. He had heard with surprize, for it was impossible for him to attend the house yesterday, that many gentlemen had given their votes that this money should be raised upon the public, although a great part of it was to go into their own pockets, as subscribers to the loan. He said he could not conceive any thing more indecent or more indiscreet. At a time when the house of commons was extremely unpopular, and deserved to be so, for gentlemen thus to disgrace its proceedings by votes so mean and selfish, was actual madness. From ministers they expected nothing but deception. But if these proceedings were carried on, the house of commons would become more unpopular even than the ministers. From the one, the people expected only to be cajoled and plundered; but from the house they had expected at least some attention to their interests; they had been disappointed, however, in such expectations. This was, indeed, taking away the public odium from the minister, and fixing it upon the house of commons. Gentlemen should beware of doing this when they saw such bodies of men in a state of desperate insubordination, for they would increase the danger which now threatened the state, by rendering the house of commons despicable in the eyes of the people. There was one point more which he must press in the way of a question, and he expected an answer from the highest authority in that house. He wanted to know whether any member of that house ought to be permitted to vote on a question in which he was interested personally, and in a pecuniary sense? They could not even be examined as witnesses in

such a case in a court of law, and they would be objected to by the same rule as jurors. He hoped these gentlemen would feel the delicacy of their present situation, and withdraw when the question was put; and if they did, he doubted very much that the minister would be successful upon the present motion.

A division took place; for the resolution 36; against it 35.

JUNE 2.

MUTINY IN THE NAVY.

Mr. Pitt moved, "That an humble address be presented to His Majesty, to return His Majesty the thanks of this house for his most gracious message:

"To express to His Majesty the concern and indignation which we must feel, in common with His Majesty, at the heinous and criminal conduct of the crews of some of His Majesty's ships, notwithstanding the offer so repeatedly made to them of His Majesty's most gracious pardon, and the proofs of the paternal regard of His Majesty, and of the liberality of parliament, which they have received in common with the rest of His Majesty's fleet:

"To assure His Majesty, that we are ready and determined to afford to His Majesty our utmost assistance in repressing such dangerous and criminal proceedings, and to adopt every measure which can tend, at this conjuncture, to provide for the public security: with this view we shall proceed, without delay, in pursuance of the recommendation of His Majesty, to consider of such farther provision as it may be necessary to make for the more effectual prevention and punishment of all traitorous attempts to excite mutiny in any part of His Majesty's forces, or to withdraw them from their duty and allegiance, and from that obedience and discipline which are so important to the prosperity and the safety of the British Empire:

"That we have the fullest reliance, that all His Majesty's faithful subjects, from sentiments of loyalty and attachment to His Majesty, and a just anxiety for their dearest interests, will be eager to manifest at so important a crisis, a full determination to contribute, on every occasion, their utmost exertions for the support of legal authority, the maintenance of peace and order, and the general protection and defence of His Majesty's kingdoms."

Mr. SHERIDAN said, that whatever difference in political opinion might prevail among gentlemen in that house, they were now come to a time when His Majesty had an undoubted right to call upon all his

subjects, of every rank, class, and description, for their zealous co-operation in maintaining the due execution of the laws, and in giving every possible efficiency to the measures of government. However justly it might be contended, that there existed strong grounds of reprehension and causes for future complaint against administration, yet such considerations were, in his opinion, at that moment completely out of the question ; and the house was now called upon to unite most earnestly with His Majesty against the fatal effects that might be produced by the perseverance in mutiny, and the dangerous disobedience of those ships mentioned in His Majesty's most gracious message. He once did intend to have submitted to the house a proposition, the efficacy of which appeared to his mind so powerful, that it would, if it had been adopted, have prevented the subject of the present discussion from taking place. But such a measure was now become useless ; and, from the events which had since happened, improper to be applied as a remedy. He lamented that the proceedings of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty had not proved successful ; but he was induced to believe, that the failure arose, in some degree, from the manner in which they were conducted. In a negotiation where you conciliate a little, and say you will conciliate no more, and then do grant more — when a Board of Admiralty is asked for and refused, and then a Board of Admiralty goes down ; then there is nothing that can be conceded as a grace which will be received as one, and nothing held out as a menace which will operate and be received as a menace. In alluding to the proposition which he meant to have submitted to the house, it was his intention to have moved for the appointment of commission, composed of men of all parties and descriptions, who might in their proceedings have been empowered to examine the claims of the seamen, to have acceded to those that appeared just and well founded, and to have rejected those which were

improper in their nature, and imprudent and dangerous to grant. Thus a commission, formed in the way which he wished, would have come at once to a definitive conclusion, by expressly stating, "We have gone thus far in agreeing to your demands, and will go no farther; any more concessions we conceive to be both dangerous and unjust." Though he sincerely deplored that the proposition had not been carried into execution, he was ready to admit that it was now become useless. The fatal perseverance in the mutiny, had placed the country in the situation described by the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt), and no person could feel more indignation against the foul incendiaries who had caused it, than himself. He was at first introduced to think, that the mutineers had acted under the impulse of momentary delusion and mistake; but their subsequent and continued conduct convinced him, that something more than delusion operated on their minds, and that a rooted spirit of disobedience had taken place of those manly and loyal sentiments with which they had been on former occasions constantly animated. If there was, indeed, a rot in the wooden walls of Old England, our decay could not be very distant. The question, as it evidently appeared in his view, was not about this or that concession, but whether the country should be laid prostrate at the feet of France? It was, in fact, a matter of no moment, whether it was laid prostrate at the feet of monarchial or republican France, for still the event would be equally fatal—equally destructive. The national commerce would necessarily prove the great object of the enemy's vengeance, and those mistaken men, who might be instrumental in producing so dreadful a crisis, would suffer most essentially in the dearest interests. Having said thus much with respect to the first part of the address, he felt himself called on to declare, that he could not give his consent to the latter part of it, for he was convinced, unless the house would make a neces-

sary distinction between giving their firm and decided support to the executive government, against both foreign and domestic enemies, and identifying the present ministers with the government of the country, nothing solid or beneficial could be done for the public safety. He could not abstain from charging His Majesty's ministers with having produced, by their weak and imprudent conduct, the calamities in which the nation was involved, although he perfectly agreed with them in expressing his indignation on the subject under discussion; and when he came to consider the manner in which the treason and sedition bills were announced, somewhat of an equal pledge with the present was pressed upon the house. He was, consequently, justified in expressing his reluctance to assent to that part of the address which respected the intention of the criminal code, on the same grounds as he objected to pledge himself to agree to the two bills which had passed. He should consider himself bound to look with a very jealous eye on any measure of the legislature, which went to increase the number of sanguinary penal laws. It was necessary, first, to inquire and ascertain, whether the present laws were deficient for the attainment of the ends proposed in the address; and he could not but recollect, with great regret, that an act somewhat similar in its nature to that proposed by the right honorable gentleman, had been passed in another country. If the bill went, therefore, to extend the sanguinary code of penal laws, without strong and sufficient grounds, he should consider himself warranted in withholding his assent to that part of the address. For that mode of legislation had been continually and systematically increased under the present administration: and what was to him a most important consideration, it had uniformly produced the very evil which it was intended to prevent. It was not requisite for him to reason at any length in support of that opinion, since facts daily confirmed it. He would

ask, 'was not the present mutiny a proof that the spirit of sedition had increased, notwithstanding the bills which had been introduced by His Majesty's ministers? They had also thought proper to adopt another remedy, which was conceived to be effectual. They had established the system of barracks, on which millions of the public money had been expended, and the house was then told, that such a system would keep the soldiers out of the way of seduction, and prevent them from being exposed to the intrigues of the emissaries of faction. The house was also told, that if the people could not be made dumb, the soldiers should be made deaf.— There was, he maintained, no proof whatever before the house to shew there was any deficiency in the existing laws to provide for the evil complained of; and until that proof was fairly made out, gentlemen could not, with any degree of consistency, pledge themselves to give their support to the bill. Knowing from experience that the moment the legislature agreed to increase the code of sanguinary penal laws, they would also agree to increase the evil intended to be remedied; he could not, therefore, give his assent to that part of the address. But as the right honorable gentleman wished so very much for unanimity in parliament, on a subject he was ready to confess of the most serious importance, he should not, for his part, interrupt this unanimity, and would, therefore, for the present, decline giving any vote at all.

The address was agreed to nem. con.

DECEMBER 14.

INCREASED ASSESSMENT OF TAXES.

Mr. Pitt moved, "That the bill for raising a sum for the supplies of the year, by an increased assessment of taxes, be read a second time."

Mr. SHERIDAN said—Sir, when any stranger, or person who has been a long time absent, first enters

a house of any establishment, it is the ordinary custom for the master of the house to do the ceremonies of the place, and welcome him on his arrival with some expression of pleasure or politeness, as a mark of hospitality. In this house, I know, Sir, there can be no master—but if there were any, I am sure it is not the honorable gentleman (Mr. Yorke), who has so taken upon himself, with such officious kindness, to act that part, and hail, with compliments so truly worthy of himself, the arrival of my right honorable friend (Mr. Fox) and myself. I cannot help thanking the honorable gentleman for his politeness, though I cannot but acknowledge my gratitude would be of a warmer kind, if the honorable gentleman had not, under form of predicting, taken upon him to prescribe what ought to be our conduct now that we have come. Whether we were or were not right in absenting ourselves, is a question, which, as was well remarked, in a certain daily paper (*the Morning Chronicle*), cannot very properly come before the house, but is to rest with our consciences and feelings, and to be canvassed only by ourselves, and our constituents. However, Sir, when we did come down last Tuesday, with full expectation to find a full senate arrayed, anxiously hearing the discussion of this very important and momentous question, with the right honorable gentleman and his faithful friends and colleagues seated in their places; I found, not less to my surprize than disappointment, that only thirty-six members were then present, and that the house and the business was to be adjourned over to a future day, for want of a sufficient number to constitute a house. The less, therefore, that is said upon gentlemen's absenting themselves, the better; I will, therefore, drop the sorry subject, and apply myself to superior matter.

My honorable friend (Mr. Nicholls) has been rebuked for introducing the question, whether the war was undertaken from necessity; and the noble Lord

who has taken upon himself the task of rebuking him, has said, that if any one differed from the opinion respecting the expediency and necessity of the war, which had been so unanimously declared by the house, or chose to give an opinion in contradiction to the unanimous resolutions of the house, he would have done it better by introducing it in the shape of a new question. Now, without disputing the noble Lord's authority in this particular rule, I must take the liberty of denying the propriety of his application of it; for, according to my notions of the long-established privileges of the house of commons of England, it is one of their leading rights, whenever they give and grant, to revise every part of the conduct of the ministers to whom they have entrusted, or are about to trust, the disposal and expenditure of the public treasure. And, if this privilege exists in us, shall we, Sir, be debarred of it by the management of His Majesty's ministers, coming forward on the first day of the session, and with a trick entrapping the house into an address unanimously declaratory of their approbation of those very ministers? I fancy not; for, if there be a time when, more than at any other, the good sense and feeling of the people ought to be appealed to, it is when we put our hands into their pockets.

I will not now, Sir, enter into a discussion of the question, whether the war was just, wise, or necessary; or unnecessary, impolitic, and wicked; for I hope to see the day, and that not a very distant one, when it will undergo full consideration—but in the mean time I hope it will not, on the other side, be insisted that peace is unattainable, and that we shall, on our part, be prevented from objecting that the war was unnecessary. An honorable gentleman on the other side has put the question, Whether we will rather carry this measure through the house, and submit to its provisions, or leave it to the French to tear the money from our pockets? If, indeed,

Sir, this were the truth, and this the only alternative, I do hope, and I most sincerely believe, there is not a man in this house, or in this country, let the minister be who he would, that would hesitate to support him in the prosecution of the war with purse, hand, and heart. If there be any who would refuse, in such a cause, to expend the last shilling of his property, and shed the last drop of his blood, he is not to be found among those who, from the beginning, have opposed the war, as equally absurd and unjust. If France looks for friends and abettors here, they must look among the slaves who bow to power, and barter their principles for their private advantage, and not among the real friends of freedom.

But here, Sir, let me be indulged in a few observations respecting the sincerity of His Majesty's ministers in their attempts at negotiation. For my part, when I look at the heap of papers that have been laid before the house on that subject, I can discover nothing in them but a trial of diplomatic skill—a contest of dexterity, who should best succeed in avoiding the imputation of duplicity, and most speciously impose on the credulity, and frustrate the expectations of Europe. Indeed, it is my opinion, that both parties were equally indisposed to peace. But admitting that such was the disposition of the French government—admitting that the French directory have behaved insultingly towards our ambassador—admitting that the whole of the French nation entertain an inveterate hatred and rancorous hostility against us, and that they are all actuated by the same hostile resolution at aiming at our destruction; must I, therefore, submit to the inference, that because pacific offers have been made and rejected, and because ministers and their plenipotentiary representative have been disrespectfully treated by the French government, ministers are to stand proudly erect, and imperiously to demand the general concurrence of all those who first had thought

proper to condemn and oppose their measures? That I and my friends have frequently urged the propriety and necessity of making pacific propositions to the enemy; that we have also pledged ourselves, should the enemy persevere in an obstinate refusal to listen to reasonable and adequate conditions, that we would support even the present administration, I am ready to confess; but that support it was our intention to afford them only as long as we thought it possible that such ministers might yet obtain a peace. That support we were disposed to lend them while our efforts were as yet seconded by powerful allies, and before the French nation had grasped at and attained their present enormous power; that pledge and promise were given while the Bank of England was yet in credit, and while the public faith remained inviolate.—But from these propositions of peace, and from these pledges of support to the present ministers, we desisted last session, circumstances compelled us to adopt a contrary conduct—instead of pledging ourselves any longer to countenance the measures of ministers, an honorable friend of mine, a worthy Alderman (Mr. Combe) brought forward a motion for an address to His Majesty, humbly beseeching him to remove his present ministers; and representing to His Majesty, that under their auspices the attainment of peace was impossible; for that instead of accelerating the return, they, on the contrary, stood directly in the way of peace; or, as the worthy Alderman then very happily expressed it, that the blessings of peace, and the blessings of the present ministry, were wholly incompatible; yet, after this direct avowal, of our total distrust of their conduct, they now come forward and tell us that we must still give them our support; that parliament is still to countenance and defend the measures of the right honorable gentleman; when, in reality, the only countenance he looks for is, that we defend his existence in administration; he who has broke the

Bank, and ruined the public credit,—though it was his proud boast, that his existence in power, and that of the prosperity of our finances, were involved in one and the same fate.

Nor am I backward, Sir, also to declare, that it is not to curb the ambition of the enemy, or to frustrate the views of French aggrandizement, that the war is now continued. The war, Sir, is continued for the sole purpose of keeping nine worthless ministers in their places. When I profess this to be my opinion, I by no means intend any thing personally disrespectful to them—their public conduct is all that I impeach; and the calamities that redound from it to the country. Indeed I feel and know it, that as long as they remain in their present sentiments, there is no possibility of their obtaining peace: and those of them who possess a sound and sincere understanding, must be as sensible of this their inability as I am. Why then will they persevere in a mercenary preference of their own interests to those of their country, convinced as they must be that the principles they have acted on, and which they still avow, must effectually prevent them from negotiating with success? And how is it possible they should ever treat with success, while they continue solemnly to hold out to the country, that the enjoyment of all that is dear to it, and that the existence of the British constitution, are inconsistent with the existence of the French republic?—that with the principles on which that republic is founded, none of the old established forms and institutions of Europe, in a word, the order of the civilized world, cannot be reconciled?—That with a power so principled and disposed, they will accede to no terms, unless they be driven to it by the last extremity? From this unwise and inadvertent declaration, what will be the conclusion which the French government must naturally draw? Why, that we attempt a negotiation only because we are reduced to the very last

extremity, as we were prepared to make every sacrifice sooner than attempt it. On the effects of such a conclusion, I must beg the house seriously to reflect. But what was the obstacle which impeded the progress, and finally broke off the first negotiation?—The obstacle publicly held out, was the possession of Belgium by the French. As long as France continued in the possession of that country, it was impossible to think of peace; not, however, that we deemed it necessary for the Emperor, but rather for ourselves. We next gave in a project of our own; and we still continued to contend that the war originated in aggression on the part of the French: but here I must beg leave to say, that the drift of our own arguments, and the principles upon which we have proceeded, would prove the aggression to be on our side. For, after the repeated avowal of the high minded principles upon which the right honorable gentleman entered into the war, and upon which his new allies are disposed to continue it, would they now say that they never would have intermeddled in the affairs of France, unless France had directly attacked us? If so, then, what becomes of the proud cause in which we thought ourselves to be engaged—the cause of religion, of humanity, of morality—the defence of civil rights, and of regular governments? The principles of the French republic are still said to be inimical to this cause; and against such principles we must all concur in continuing the war; then England must appear to be the aggressor, whether we persevere in the contest from the magnanimity of these principles, or from some other less glorious motive.

When, then, may we now expect to treat? If religion, morality, civilized government, &c. &c. invaluable objects, no doubt, are to be no longer contended for; are we to persist in the war for the possession of the Cape of Good Hope, the island of Ceylon, and Trincomale? And are these the fair

prizes to which we aspire, and to which the boasted defence of religion, morality, &c. must be sacrificed? Must we then, for all our indemnities, fall foul on our allies, and the concessions we contend for, be torn from the Dutch? If we persist in these demands, and the French continue to reject them, what then will remain to be done? Must we again rear the standard of morality and religion?—Is it then we are told that we must fight manfully—Would it not be better that those who would have us fight manfully, should manfully give up their places? And by what means do they endeavor to reconcile us to this hopeless contest? By craftily setting up our pride against our interest—by asking us, are we not ready to spend our last shilling, and our last drop of blood, sooner than permit the enemy to dictate to us the choice of our ministers. But this betrays only mean and little craft, and no soundness of judgment. Have not ministers themselves endeavored to dictate to France the mode of government it should adopt? Have they even contented themselves with prescribing the principles it should act on?—Have they not, moreover, insisted on their choice of persons and of forms? That such was their intention, appears from no less an authority than His Majesty's speech, wherein parliament is told, that when such an order of things is established in France, as may enable their government to maintain the usual relations of peace and amity, then he would have no objections to treat with them. Is not this dictating to France the form of government she should embrace? And has not the directory a right to retort upon us, and say, that until they adopt the form of government we choose to prescribe, England will continue in her hostility to France; and there can be no solid and secure peace between the two nations, but at best an hollow truce, a mere suspension of arms? In this opinion his right honorable friend, (Mr. Windham) if so I may pre-

sume to call him, must undoubtedly acquiesce; for according to him, a peace with France, while France continues to act on her present principles, would be far worse than any thing that may arise from the continuance of the war. In this opinion, at least, I doubt not but he is sincere.

The people, we are told, must now submit to great burdens, and these burdens shall fall where property is great. But when they are called on to submit to great burdens; in my opinion, they should have great examples to encourage them. They are told, your private interest is nothing, the public interest must be all to you. But with what face can this language be held to them, either by the right honorable gentleman, or his new converts? For is there a man among them who has not betrayed more anxiety to secure his own individual job, at the expense of the country, than to contribute towards relieving the country from the burdens under which it groans? When we hear that in one office, that of the Secretary at War, the clerks have fees and perquisites from the amount of 5,000*l.* to 18,000*l.* some gentlemen may treat such perquisites as mere parings of cheese and ends of candles, but the public must wonder at the immense size of this consecrated cheese, and be dazzled with the light of those flaming tapers, that thus blaze on the altar of corruption.

As to the measure more immediately before the house, I cannot but mark it with my strongest disapprobation; nor can I wait for its going into a committee before I express this my opinion of it; for no possible modification it can receive will be able to reconcile me to a measure, the principle of which I abhor. It is a measure that argues the grossest and most irrational violation and outrage of the regulation of all taxes; it runs foul on all the principles on which they can be raised: it is a penalty on economy—a bounty on perjury—a libel on the public spirit—a commission of bankruptcy

against the whole commercial part of the community. To shew the impracticability of such a measure, I shall not now detain the house with any detail of argument; it stands sufficiently evidenced by the resolutions unanimously voted this day by the City of London, and which shew that it is impossible for a very numerous class of householders ever to pay the tax, should the proposed mode of raising it be unfortunately passed into a law. It is a fact equally evident, that they are not able to pay the taxes now imposed upon them. Indeed, when so large a class of the community are unable to contribute to the exigences of the state, we must be very near the end of our resources. But we are told, it will not affect the poorer descriptions of the people. No assertion can be more unfounded: for must it not touch all those profits arising from the luxuries in which the rich indulge? Must not the retrenchments of the wealthy trench on the means of subsistence of the poor? Yes—you may tell us, they are not taxed. The poor are not taxed, I allow you; but they will be starved; for they must be starved who derived their livelihood from the expenses of the great.

Numberless are the objections that may be urged to the principle of this bill: it goes to impose a tax on the expenditure, and not upon property. But I would agree with the right honorable gentleman that property should be taxed, could he devise a criterion by which it could be accurately estimated; but surely he will not say, that carriages, horses, &c. are a perfect criterion of property: he has already admitted that they are not, and in this I also agree with him. But sure I am, that the ultimate operation of the present bill must tend to ferret out all property; but can this end be attained without the disclosure of the means of individuals? If such a system be, therefore, enforced, will it not go to erect in every parish a fiscal inquisition, to pry into the property of individuals, to ascertain their gains

or their profits, and thus lay open and expose the improvement or decay of their circumstances? Will not such a system prove hostile and fatal to all industry, to all trade, and cut up by the roots every species of property? Look at the bill. What does it tell you? If you are over-rated, then you may appeal—and to whom? To your own neighbours and fellow-parishioners, if any description of men can be found of so base a nature as to undertake an office so degrading. But to what a trying situation must the person so appealing be exposed! If the spies of government say they doubt his word, he is then to be examined upon oath; and evidence may also be brought on oath to contradict his declaration. To what a situation, I say, is he then reduced! Either he must incur the suspicion of being a perjured man, so strong are the temptations held out to him—or, if he makes a fair avowal of his circumstances, and says his income amounts to 200*l.*, (without taking into account the accidental circumstances that may impair it) should it come to be impaired, and the next year amount but to 150*l.*—either he must appeal, and divulge the decay of his circumstances, or he must hold up a false front to those with whom he deals; and, should he fail, be accused of having held out false pretences, to have upheld his credit by fraud. If he comes forward, and makes this discovery of his situation, he is accessory to his own ruin; and if he shrinks from this discovery, he may forfeit his character for integrity. Upon the whole, if you follow up the principle, you must get at all actual property. To this it must ultimately go: but then it would be found a mean and narrow principle, and principally arising from narrow prejudices. If you attempt to call on the highly opulent, whose income may exceed 20,000*l.* per annum, but who spend comparatively little, how are you to ascertain the proportion they should pay? It cannot be done; and if it could, the attempt would be impolitic and unjust.

The right honorable gentleman has said, that he wished he could get at the hoards of the miser; that misers ought not to be permitted to delight in pressing their bags under their pillows, without coming forward with their due proportion for the protection which the state gives to their treasure. If such treasures had never been actively employed in industrious commerce, it might be proper to derive a resource from them; but who would toil for an income, if they were not permitted to spare or expend it, according to their own notions, and in the same spirit with which it was amassed? Such a measure is sacred, and not to be touched. The revenue, it is true, depends, in a great measure, on the liberal, or rather prodigal, expenditure of the opulent; but if there is permitted to be no saving, and all must spend to a proportionate extent, then you enforce a maxim destructive of the vital principle of all industry and prosperity. To the sacred principle of saving I cannot but profess myself a friend, though the habits of my own life have been little regulated on it; and to encroach on this sacred principle, will be utterly to extinguish the spirit which enlivens industry, and from which all private and public wealth can alone be derived. However the right honorable gentleman may be disposed, from the general opposition with which he sees the country receive his proposal, to give a variety of modifications to it, there is no possible modification which can reconcile me to its adoption.

The house divided; for the second reading 175; against it 50.

JANUARY 4, 1798.

INCREASED ASSESSMENT OF TAXES.

The order of the day for the third reading of this bill was read.

Mr. SHERIDAN rose and said, the honorable gentleman (Mr. Martin) who has just sat down has

called for more explanations of what other gentlemen have advanced than I ever recollect to have heard in this house. In candor I must conclude that the honorable gentleman really wanted information upon the points which he affected not to understand; and that where he did misunderstand or mistake the arguments of others, he did not mean to be guilty of wilful misrepresentation. The speech of the honorable gentleman, however, called upon so many members to explain the points upon which he has commented, that I have been under the necessity to give way to them. I now rise, thus early in the debate, and I feel some satisfaction in reflecting that the adjournment which has taken place gives me an opportunity of presenting myself when the attention of the house was awake, because, had I proceeded last night, I might have found the honorable gentleman (Mr. Martin) wearied and exhausted, and disposed, perhaps, to give me a hint to sit down before I had finished my argument. I have listened to the speech of the honorable gentleman (Mr. Perceval); a speech of great talent, great ingenuity, and considerable vehemence. The sentiments which it contains seemed to be so much in unison with the feelings of those around him, that I flatter myself that the approbation with which it has been received may contribute to shorten the debate, and to supersede the necessity of making long speeches from that side of the house. It was remarkable, however, that the honorable gentleman, amidst a variety of matter on which he descanted, cautiously abstained from touching upon the real question before the house. Many of the topics which he brought forward, I am ready to admit, were fairly introduced, and perfectly regular in parliamentary debate. While I admit the right of the honorable gentleman to argue the subject in his own way, it perhaps might have been better had he altogether abstained from certain points; or, to use a phrase which has become very fashionable since the intro-

duction of the present bill, had he modified his attack upon my right honorable friend. The honorable gentleman never attempted to shew that the right honorable gentleman below him was the fittest person to administer the affairs of this country, that he was the ablest minister for the conduct of war, and the most proper person to negotiate with success. The whole scope of his speech was merely to show that the right honorable gentleman was placed in the avenue to bar my right honorable friend, as if it necessarily followed that he alone could be the successor of the present minister. Supposing, as he did, for the sake of argument, that my right honorable friend was qualified to negotiate with a better prospect of success than the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he said it would be incumbent upon the house, as a preliminary step, to treat with their negotiator. He thought that my right honorable friend could not be invested with that character without danger to the country. What were the grounds upon which this assertion was founded? He accuses my right honorable friend of having considered men as innocent who were acquitted by the verdict of a jury, and having argued upon this acquittal, that there was no proof of the conspiracy of which they were accused. He accuses him of having said, on the discussions to the treason and sedition bills, that resistance would be a question, not of morality, but of prudence. Above all, he founded his apprehension upon words which he supposes to have been lately used by my right honorable friend, that he would take no share in any administration without a total, fundamental, and radical reform. The honorable gentleman has made a very pretty play upon these words. I cannot but suspect, however, that the honorable gentleman, who has been celebrated for epigram, has put these words into the mouth of my right honorable friend merely for the sake of the point with which he has contrasted them. He finds out that the reform so

broadly stated will not be a total reform ; that the fundamental reform will not touch the foundation ; and that the radical reform will be confined to the branches without descending to the root. This epigrammatic wit, however, is founded entirely upon the words which the honorable gentleman has purposely added to the expression to which he alludes. They were not used by my right honorable friend. The expression he employed, and which has become more conspicuous from its being made the subject of particular thanks in certain resolutions lately advertised, was that he would take no share in any administration, without a radical reform in the representation, and of the abuses of the present system. Such was the expression of my right honorable friend, and the words which the honorable gentleman has added into the bargain, were merely introduced to point a sentence, and to enliven his speech. The honorable gentleman considers the conduct of those whom he represents as unfit successors to the present men in power, as calculated to encourage the jacobins, and to forward the views of the French. These certainly are formidable evils, but the honorable gentleman quickly discovers some ground of consolation amidst the dangers which he apprehends. He thinks that my right honorable friend would retract the declarations he has made, that he would renounce the principles he has avowed, and that in office he would not act upon the professions he held before he came into power. On what part of the conduct of my right honorable friend he founds this assertion, I am at a loss to conjecture. What are the professions made when out of office which in power he has belied ?—True it is, that such conduct is not unusual with statesmen.—True it is, that there have been men who have forfeited such pledges ; who have said that there could be no salvation for this country without a radical reform (for this, beyond dispute, was the expression of the right honorable gentleman opposite) who

have maintained that no honest man could undertake the administration of this country without that reform ; and have, like him, abandoned the words and principles they once held, and resisted by all the power of corruption the cause which they laboured to promote. With the right honorable gentleman, the type and image of apostacy before his eyes, it perhaps was natural that the honorable gentleman should consider professions as made only to be renounced. When he reflected that the present minister had not only abandoned the principles he professed, and violated the faith he pledged to the public, but had become the most zealous persecutor of those whom he had convinced by his arguments, and influenced by his example, there was no wonder that he should distrust professions, and ascribe but little sincerity to the declarations of statesmen. The honorable gentleman apprehends that many dreadful consequences would ensue were this radical reform to be carried into effect. What that radical change of system is to be the honorable gentleman professes to be ignorant. For my own part I can say, that no man can be more decidedly hostile than I am to any change of system that could lead to a change of the ancient established constitution of this government. But I will tell the honorable gentleman what has been the consequence of that change of system which has been introduced into the constitution of this country. If any minister of brilliant talents, of splendid endowments, but actuated by principles of the most boundless and colossal ambition, raised up by influence, supported by corruption, should set at nought the rules of parliament, violate the act of appropriation, raise money without the authority of this house, and send it out of the country without the consent of parliament ; if he has transgressed the constitution with impunity, if his criminality is suffered to pass even without rebuke—this is nothing less than a radical change of system. If by

his folly and incapacity he has raised discontents—if by the burdens which he has imposed to support an unpolitic and ruinous system, he has alienated the minds of the people from his government—if to suppress the opposition which such a state of things must naturally produce, he has had recourse to military force, and covered the country with barracks, in defiance of the constitution—such practices constitute a radical change of system. If he has distinguished his administration by severity unknown to the laws of this country—if he has introduced new codes of treason and sedition—if he has doomed men of talents to the horrors of transportation, the victims of harsh and rigorous sentences—if he has laboured to vilify and to libel the conduct of juries—such proceedings originate in a radical change of system. If he has used the royal prerogative in the creation of peers, not to reward merit, but converted the peerage into the regular price of base and servile support—if he has carried this abuse so far that, were the indignant, insulted spirit of this nation roused at length to demand justice on the crime of which he has been guilty, he would be tried in a house of peers, where the majority of the judges were created by himself—I will tell the honorable gentleman that such a state of things must have originated in a radical change of system. Would it not be right then to pull down that fabric of corruption, to recal the government to its original principles, and to re-establish the constitution upon its true basis? Will any set of men deny the necessity of a radical change of system by which these evils shall be corrected, but those who already share in its corruptions, or who at some future period expect to promote their personal interests by those very abuses which have exhausted the strength and endangered the safety of their country?

So much, then, for what the honorable gentleman has said upon this subject. It must now be clear that no peace can be obtained. It was not even

supposed by the friends of ministers that they were sincere in their attempts at peace till the last trial. Then I am rather inclined to give them credit for sincerity, though I can see that a right honorable gentleman (Mr. Windham) trembles at the very idea of peace with the French republic. The honorable gentleman, however, takes it for granted, that there can be no choice, but between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and my right honorable friend; on a former occasion, however, I stated, that any other set of men should try to negociate peace with France, because any set of men must negociate with a better prospect of success than the present ministers; it is not in nature, that the French can consider the right honorable gentleman capable of maintaining the relations of peace and amity with their government. They know that the hostile mind exists, that peace is not sought in the spirit of peace, that no real reconciliation is desired. Any peace that could be concluded I could consider as a false and hollow truce. It could not be a ground of security; it could not restore the blessings of peace. Upon the faith of it I could not consent to the reduction of a single man in the army, or naval establishment of this country. Jealousies and suspicions would poison all the advantages which a sincere peace could bestow. The French would feel that they furnished to the administration of this country the means of fomenting the dissensions in France from which they cherish the hope of re-establishing royalty; they would lay themselves open to those intrigues, and to that corruption which have hitherto been employed to overthrow their new institutions. If the French directory could encourage or agree to such an insidious truce, and expose the government which they administer to such attacks, as in this way it would sustain, they would be guilty of treason to their country. But it is impossible they could risk such dangers. It is impossible that they

could stake their existence on the hollow and deceitful peace which the present minister could offer.

The honorable gentleman then cannot say, that there is no alternative between those who are in power, and those he points out as their successors. From different men and different measures, hopes of peace might be derived. But it is said that my right honorable friend, and those who act with him, are co-operating with the French; and what is the proof of this assertion? Why the French say so! This indeed is a curious mode of proving the fact. It would indeed be a hard rule if what the enemy say of what is done by any members of the British parliament, was to be the standard by which they are to be judged. We are not to be tried by what we have said, by the measures we have recommended, by the whole of our conduct, and by our own professions, but by the opinion which the enemy may think proper to express. But how then do we co-operate with the enemy? We are friends to reform; a phrase which, it seems, is henceforth to be deemed synonymous with revolution. But how is this reform, from which such dreadful consequences are apprehended, to be introduced, were my right honorable friend to support it when in office? Will not the right honorable gentleman be still ready to oppose it? The honorable gentleman either thinks that my honorable friend, when minister, will have in favor of reform that corruption, that influence, those titles, those jobs and contracts, by which it is now opposed; or he thinks that parliament being dissolved, that corruption and influence will be employed to induce the people to choose representatives favourable to the cause of reform. What do these arguments prove but the necessity of a reform? It proves that the pretended representation of the country is in the hands of the crown, to be moulded at the pleasure of the minister of the day, and thus furnishes the most powerful motive to remove the causes by which this corruption is maintained.

Having made these remarks upon the topics introduced by the honorable gentleman, I shall next say a few words upon some things which fell from a noble lord (Hawkesbury) in yesterday's debate. The noble lord says that those who oppose all supply ought to have made that opposition when the supply was voted. For my own part I am not against all supply, though I am not sure that a different conduct would be fully as proper. But in a constitutional view nothing can be more parliamentary than to refuse voting supply. It is fair to infer that if ministers have not the confidence of this house, the refusal of supplies would be attended with the immediate resignation of those ministers. Certainly it is not the intention of any man that the army or navy should be disbanded, and the country laid at the feet of the enemy. Such an alternative does not follow from the refusal of supplies. I confess, however, when I consider the desperate characters of some of the ministers in power, I think it would not be advisable to risk the attempts of which they might be guilty to retain their power, even in defiance of the constitutional privileges of this house. The noble lord however says, that never was the naval superiority of this country more conspicuously displayed, never was our naval glory more highly exalted, than by the brilliant victories obtained during the present war. What however must be the nature of the war, when these splendid successes have not brought us nearer to the objects for which we engaged in the contest? What must be the importance of our acquisitions, when they are all to be given for peace? How would France have stood had we not entered? says the noble lord. What additional strength would she not have derived from those ships and those colonies of which she has been deprived by our success? But let any man weigh the advantages we have derived from our success, with the sacrifices by which they have been purchased. Will any man say, that if this

country had preserved a dignified neutrality, France, surrounded as she was by foreign enemies, would have still more oppressed and harassed her subjects to raise a naval power which no danger required? Contrary to all practice, to all experience to what has been considered as the object of continental diversion promoted by this country, would France, in the situation in which she was placed, have turned her attention to naval exertions? But we gained several ships by the victory of the first of June, by the capture of Toulon, by the acquisition of those charnel houses in the West Indies, in which 50,000 men have been lost to this country. Consider the price which has been paid for these successes. For these boasted successes, I will say, give me back the blood of Englishmen which has been shed in this fatal contest—give me back the 250 millions of debt which it has occasioned—give me back the honor of the country, which has been tarnished—give me back the credit of the country, which has been destroyed—give me back the solidity of the Bank of England, which has been overthrown; the attachment of the people to their ancient constitution, which has been shaken by acts of oppression and tyrannical laws—give me back the kingdom of Ireland, the connexion of which is endangered by a cruel and outrageous system of military coercion—give me back that pledge of eternal war which must be attended with inevitable ruin! Put what we have lost into the scale against what we have gained, and say if the price exceeds the value of the object. But even all these advantages, we are told, may be given up for peace. Surely, then, a person of the noble lord's abilities can never consider these objects as acquisition, as gain, which are to be given up for peace, and leave us without a compensation for all the sacrifices which we have made for their attainment. The noble lord says, that the value of the West India islands taken from the enemy must be estimated in relation to our own. By the offensive

measures against the former, the latter were preserved. If this be the case, then, when we give up the islands we have conquered, we give up our own islands, and abandon the security by which they are held. Such are the acquisitions which we have made at the expense of so much blood and treasure.

With regard to the continental war, the noble lord says, that we had done our duty; but he now discovers, that our allies were guilty of every error, and all of them were destitute of common honesty. After some years experience of the conduct of our allies, and of the principles by which they were guided, the noble lord could vote for giving two millions to one of them. Even this ally, the theme of so much panegyric, in whose success it was said that every peasant in this country was interested, in whose glory every Englishman partook, is now comprehended in the general charge of the noble lord against the continental members of the confederacy. But in the prosecution of their views of personal interest and aggrandizement, they took the example from the conduct of this country. When they found the hypocritical pretences of religion, morality, and social order belied by our eagerness to seize upon every island, to plunder every possession which was exposed to our power, they began to entertain similar views, and to be actuated by the same motives. Those who would succeed ministers, it is said, however, are connected with Jacobins. Who are they who are connected with the Jacobins? Would it be the same thing to entrust the administration of affairs in the hands of those who oppose ministers, as if the Whigs in 1745 had resigned the state into the hands of the Tories? The latter were avowedly desirous to alter the succession; but will gentlemen seriously say, that they believe that those whom they represent as the only rivals of the present ministers, are leagued with any faction to alter the constitu-

tion of this country, in the same manner as the Jacobites in the year 1745 were hostile to the existing establishment?

Availing himself of the latitude of reply which the general topics brought forward by those who have spoken upon any thing but the question before the house, I shall now proceed to make some remarks on the speech of a learned doctor who spoke last night. Having come to this house several hours after the debate had begun, and finding that the gentlemen who spoke after I came in, confined themselves very little to the discussion of the present measure, I was obliged to take it for granted, the particular question before the house had been very fully discussed in the speeches which were made before my arrival. The learned doctor to whom I have alluded, perhaps may not remember that he spoke at all. A wise man, it is said, doubts of every thing; and the learned doctor seemed to carry his scepticism a great way, for at the commencement of his speech he doubted whether he was speaking. I remember the words with which he began were, "Sir, in rising to address myself to you on the present occasion, if I have risen." If the learned gentleman still doubts whether he spoke at all, I can assure him that he made a very ingenious, a very elaborate, and certainly a long speech upon a variety of topics, without speaking at all to the bill before the house; and if he doubts my authority, any other gentleman may probably give him the same assurance. The learned gentleman went into a wide view of Roman history, and told us, upon the authority of Scipio, that we had little to dread from the threatened invasion of the enemy, because they must conquer us before we could conquer them. What would the Lord Mayor and aldermen of London say, if the learned gentleman were to tell them, when Buonaparte was encamped at Blackheath, that they need be under no apprehension; that, before he could advance to burn the city of London,

Lord Hawkesbury was marching to lay Paris in ashes? I should like to see the faces of the mercantile world, when they were informed, on the authority of Scipio, that they could not be safe till the enemy were at the gates of the metropolis, and that they could not hope for a successful termination of the contest, till they had been first conquered! In the representation of the conduct of Hanno, at Carthage, by whose exertions the supplies were refused to Hannibal, the learned doctor did not do justice to Hanno. At the same time it is to be observed, that he said not a word of the striking difference between Hanno the Carthaginian, and the Hanno whom he insinuated to be in the British senate. Hanno succeeded in keeping back the supplies. But has the British Hanno ever been able to prevail upon the senate to refuse supplies? has he unnerved the vigor of our exertions? has he checked the career of success? has he suspended our victorious arms in the moment of triumph? On the contrary, has not the minister received supplies with unexampled profusion? has he not been allowed to employ them as he thought proper? has he ever been rebuked for misapplication? has his misconduct ever been the subject even of inquiry? Hannibal, too, was a young man—*flagrantem cupidine regni*. The argument of Hanno was, “I hear of the victories of Hannibal, but I hear of no advantage which they produce to Carthage.” Every victory is followed by fresh demands, and new requisitions. The continuance of the war, therefore, must prove ruinous to Carthage. The affairs of the Carthaginians afterwards miscarried. Hannibal afterwards laughed at his countrymen. But what did he laugh at? He laughed at those men who affected to be dissatisfied with the terms of peace, without considering in whose hands they had left the conduct of the war. In similar circumstances, any man might, perhaps, smile like Hannibal, to see the people of this country discontented

with the terms of peace, when it was remembered that the war was prosecuted under the auspices of the present ministers.

I cannot refrain, however, from expressing my astonishment, that a grave personage like the learned gentleman, a member of the gravest profession which this house contains, should bring forward all his school-boy politics to evince the propriety of invading France. The learned gentleman, perhaps, thinks that it falls to his share to support in this house the opinions of a man of much greater talents, of much higher endowments, the late Mr. Burke, whose name ought never to be mentioned but with respect. He thinks, perhaps, that he is the executor of that great man's principles; that he is called upon to administer to his fury without possessing a single spark of his fire. I regret that any gentleman should conceive himself the representative of the violent and extravagant declamations which so fatally were received in this house with so much approbation, and which have been attended with such lamentable consequences to this country and to Europe.

The frivolous school-boy topics, for such they are, upon which the learned gentleman proposes to model our conduct, have indeed no similarity to the circumstances in which we are placed. When he desires to imitate the conduct of the Romans, does he remember that the Romans were a people inured to war and to hardships? Does he mean to compare a commercial country like Great Britain with a warlike people like the Romans, or to point out similar rules of policy for the guidance of our conduct? Had Rome the debt by which this country is borne down? Had Rome the bulwark of a navy supported by commerce? Would sacking that capital have given a death to that credit, by which alone we can subsist as a nation? If the arguments of the learned gentleman could even produce the effect which he desires, the event

would not furnish a subject for the moralist and the historian, but the fate which would await the right honorable gentleman, if he was seduced by such councils, might be expressed in the language of the poet—

I demens curre per Alpes,
Ut pueris placeas et declamatio fias.

Posterity would brand his name in the same manner, furnishing in his destruction only the subject of panegyric to school-boy politicians, and a speech to a grave doctor learned in the law.

The learned gentleman, amidst all his topics of argument, said nothing as to the nature of the bill before the house. If, after the deviations which the course which the debate has taken, I may venture to take that liberty without being called to order, I shall now say a few words to the question. It has been asked, do those who oppose this measure admit the principle, or can they produce any thing better? Certainly no person is bound to propose a measure of his own when he rises to oppose that of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, yet in such a crisis as the present it would be unmanly to withhold any ideas which we can contribute, or any of the sentiments we entertain. I then say that the only mode by which any sum like that required can be raised, is by a loan, the interest of which is to be paid by taxes or voluntary contribution, with a sinking fund for the extinction of the debt. This is the true principle by which money in this country can be raised. Suppose it is impossible to borrow; in such a state of things this country is ruined. If government cannot borrow, the subject cannot give. I am very far from wishing to inculcate despair. If I really entertained such a sentiment, I should wish to disguise it even to myself. But we may yet borrow. How then are the funds to be raised to that state at which it may be convenient to borrow? It must be done by abandoning the system in which we have proceeded, by retrenchment

in the public expense. If public spirit does exist, voluntary subscriptions may afford some aid; but, of this, I confess, I am not very sanguine. Above all, however, it is necessary to restore the Bank to its former credit, to prevent any stipulation being made to prevent it from paying its just debts; and to restore to the country the blessings of peace. As to the present measure, it must end in forced contribution of income by forced disclosure, a thing utterly irreconcilable to the spirit of a free and commercial country. If assessors were to be appointed arbitrarily to make assessments of the income of every individual, which from the surveys already made by the collectors, of the income of individuals, seems to be the design of ministers, such a mode of proceeding would be a better criterion than the assessed taxes. In my mind, no criterion at all, however good it may be thought, can render the principle tolerable. Those who, from the criterion taken up by the minister this year have been caught, will be careful in future to avoid any external symptoms, by which on any future occasion they might be assessed. It will occasion universal retrenchment, and, consequently, injure the revenue by destroying consumption. The effect of this system of retrenchment will diminish the public revenue by at least two millions. An arbitrary assessment would be better than that taken on any criterion, because the former would make it indifferent to the person contributing whether he spent all his income or not; while the latter would induce him to avoid every appearance that could be made the future standard of contribution. A coach-maker, in Long-acre, would do wisely, if he could, to give at once an hundred pounds, than a much smaller sum which deprived him of his customers. In the same manner the watch-makers. Their employment was not taxed, because that would seem to tax ingenious mechanics; but those who wore watches were taxed, and many industrious men

were reduced to the most deplorable wretchedness. The whole system and principle of the measure appears to me utterly irreconcilable with every wise and just scheme of taxation.

What substitute then is to be taken? There are but three ways in which this sum can be raised within the year—either by voluntary contributions, by increasing the existing taxes, or a forced loan; and of these three the present measure is the worst. Might not the whole of the plan be postponed, except that which provides for voluntary contributions? And I am sure, for one, I have no objection to read the bill, in that case, three times in one day, that we may try this experiment. With this bill hanging over, such contributions could not be called voluntary, for no man could hesitate, in point of prudence, to pay the full amount of what he would be obliged to pay rather than be made to contribute on the valuation of income taken from any visible symptoms. I am not very sanguine of the success of voluntary contributions, without some such compulsion. From the highest to the lowest of those connected with the government, there has been no disposition to give up any thing: there has been no example to the people of this spirit of sacrifice. It is not easy to encourage individuals in the habits of acquisition, and the spirit of liberality towards the government. If a Bengal memshi, or a Chinese mandarin, were to be informed that four hundred millions had been lent to the government by individual; that a race was run by the competitors for the preference; that men contended about the subdivision of the portions, and to parcel out the parts among a crowd of friends, he would be ready to exclaim, O magnanimous, O invincible people! Were he again to be told that the views which actuated the lenders were selfish, that their profits were usurious; that loyalty-loan holders had besieged their house for indemnification for the loss sustained on a bargain, he would exclaim, O wretched,

O undone people! It is by addressing the interest of this body of men, however, that the accommodation of the government can be secured; and how is the credit of the country to be restored to that situation which will render it practicable?

No disposition to contribute voluntarily has yet been displayed from the very highest to the lowest ranks in the administration of government. While a teller of the Exchequer receives ten or twelve thousand pounds a year by the war, a near relation of that person contends that no peace ought to be made. But I am told that it is rude, uncourteous, vulgar, to suppose that such a sum could influence the sentiments of any man. Rude, uncourteous and vulgar as this is, the constitution is that rude, vulgar fellow, though the right honorable gentleman will flout and scorn those who suppose motives of this nature. The constitution is jealous of the effect of office, and even sends a man back to his constituents who accepts a situation to which important duties are attached. I have high authority therefore in supposing that some bias may affect the mind where interest powerfully prompts a man to support any system of measures. I recollect, that at the end of the American war, when I was secretary to the Treasury, the noble marquis, who is teller of the Exchequer, wrote a letter to the commissioners of the Treasury, requesting that the office might be placed in the reform, but saying at the same time, that his conscience would burn to think that he was profiting by the calamities of the country. This offer, however, was declined. Now, however, when the public exigencies so strongly demand some sacrifice, I am persuaded the noble marquis will not only be ready to forego a part of the profits of his office, but will bring up all the arrears that burn upon his conscience since the year 1783.

Last year I took occasion to state that twenty-four millions would be necessary for the peace

establishment of the country, taking the average peace establishment before the war at seventeen millions. Since that period, seven and a half millions of permanent taxes have been added, and it will require another million and a half before the sum already expended and due can be provided. Thus twenty-six millions must be raised, though peace were immediately to take place. When it is considered, however, what any new peace establishment must be; when the system which is pursued in this country is taken into view; when the manner in which Ireland is not governed, but ground down and oppressed; when the hollow and deceitful nature of any peace with the right honorable gentleman is recollected, no man can think that two millions more, making twenty-eight millions, would be an extravagant computation as the amount of the permanent peace establishment. This is a tremendous and awful consideration; but if the country is to be saved, we must look our situation in the face, and make provision for the utmost extent of our difficulties.

While the Bank continues in its present state of dependance on the minister, it is impossible to hope, however, that public credit can be restored, and the funds raised. Last year much was said in the newspapers about the connection between the right honorable gentleman and the Bank. It was said, that the banns had been forbid. The conduct of the Chancellor of the Exchequer shewed that he cultivated the connection on account of the lady's dowry, not for the comfort of her society. At first the affair seemed to present the appearance of a penitent seduction, but now it has degenerated into a contented prohibition. The country wished to forgive the indiscretion, on the hopes of amendment. What has produced the infatuation it is not easy to conjecture, unless the right honorable gentleman had given the old lady love-powder. The heyday of the blood was over, but the rankness of passion

has not subsided. The dear dear deceiver is taken into favor, and the ruin he has occasioned is forgotten.

Upon the examination into the affairs of the Bank, the standing committee of correspondence between the Bank and the minister pronounce, that there are sufficient means to pay all the private debts of the Bank—but the minister interposes. The Bank is placed in the situation of a person who can pay and will not. Of all situations none could be more injurious to credit than this. When it is known that men are willing to pay, credit stretches a great way in favor of their ability, but when a person is understood to be able to pay, and will not, the confidence on which credit must be founded is overthrown.

The manner in which the last report of the Bank committee is drawn up, is likewise very curious. It is found there is enough of fund to pay the private creditors of the Bank ; but no, says the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and claps his lock and key on their coffers. Without meaning any quibble on the name of the honorable chairman of the committee, the conduct of the right honorable gentleman irresistibly reminds me of an old proverb. The report of the committee is very favorable, but still the Bank must be kept under confinement. “Brag is a good dog,” says the Chancellor of the Exchequer, “but Holdfast is a better,” and the Bank must be kept under the tutorage of the minister till he finds it convenient for himself to set the directors at liberty. The advances made by the Bank to government occasioned the first stoppage, and now three millions are again to be advanced without any security whatever. If the directors do not insist on some security for their repayment, they will be guilty of a gross breach of duty, and the most culpable neglect of the interest of their constituents. It seems that the Bank is to be the new Temple of Janus—ever shut in time of war. While war conti-

nues we must be contented to view the meagre paper profile; nor will we be permitted to contemplate the golden bust till the return of peace. The French directory are thus to have the keys of the Bank, which cannot be opened till they grant permission.

The right honorable gentleman says, that the French aim their attacks against the credit of this country, and it is necessary to guard against their design. The expression of the report is whimsical enough: it states, that the enemy design to attack us "by means of our credit." No, says the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I have taken care to take that weapon out of your hands; a dangerous weapon like this I certainly will not leave you to employ. It is said by some, that the conduct of those who oppose the minister encourages the French; while, on the contrary, the whole system of his administration tends to encourage their designs. He has taught them to believe that he governs the lower classes only by coercion, and the upper ranks by corruption. More is done by the language held by some gentlemen in this house, that it is necessary to confine the soldiers in barracks, to make them deaf, if the people cannot be made dumb, than by any conduct which can be imputed to the opposers of ministers. By shewing that the minister can get no support unpurchased, the enemy are led to think that there is no public spirit in the country—that nothing can be done but by jobs, and titles, and pensions. What can they think of those who come forward under the pretence of public spirit, when they see that every man obtains his own private job as the reward of his ministerial devotion? They saw that disgrace after disgrace never diminished his power; that every successive attack on liberty was defended and supported by compliant majorities; that every new failure served only to rivet the attachment of his servile adherents. When they see the nation endure these things, can they con-

ceive that it will be found to contain much public spirit to resist a foreign enemy? Beyond question great sacrifices must be made, whoever is minister; and if the enemy persevere in their designs, resistance to invasion must be encouraged at every hazard. We must give up the idea, however, of doing this, and continuing in a state of luxury. Should it be necessary, we must shew that we are ready to strip to the skin to maintain our independence and our liberties, in the same manner as they were compelled to struggle for their freedom. It is mere cant and delusion; to talk any longer of giving up a part to preserve the whole—that we must leave both our liberty and property unmortgaged to posterity. If I am called upon to pay a shilling to preserve, this is intelligible; but if I am called upon twenty times successively for my shilling, it is ridiculous to tell me of giving a part for the preservation of the whole. This will not do: and as a worthy baronet (Sir W. Pulteney) said on another occasion, if it is so often repeated, it comes to be no joke. This kind of paradoxical insult cannot long be endured. It will not do to tell us, that sending millions of money to Germany, for the defence of this country, is true economy; that to lop off the most valuable of our liberties, is to preserve the constitution; that not to pay its lawful creditors, is to support the credit of the Bank; and to introduce a universal disclosure of income, is to protect property. This is the last stage of such delusion. The tricks have been too often repeated to elude the most inattentive observation. While the affairs of this country continue in the same hands, they cannot be administered wisely or well. The country cannot have confidence in a system, always unsuccessful, now hopeless; and the dismissal of ministers must be the preliminary step to any vigor of system, or any prospect of peace.

The house divided on the question for the third reading; ayes 196; noes 71.

APRIL 4.

BILL FOR PREVENTING THE MISCHIEFS ARISING
FROM THE PRINTING AND PUBLISHING OF
NEWSPAPERS BY PERSONS UNKNOWN, AND
FOR REGULATING THEIR PRINTING AND
PUBLICATION IN OTHER RESPECTS.

The Attorney-General moved for leave to bring in this bill.

Mr. SHERIDAN^A declared, he would object to any kind of measure introduced by the learned gentleman, concerning what he terms restricting the license, and limiting within bounds, the press.—Every allowance to which the honorable gentleman was entitled, upon the principle of candour, should be allowed him; but, in the instance before him, he had reason to suspect that very great latitude in that particular virtue could not be attributed to him. He was free to say, that in the bill, and in its tendency, lay concealed a design of destroying the liberty of the press altogether. This he considered but merely the preface to that which, probably, at no very distant period, was intended, namely, a general crush of every publication not exactly according with the party in power. He perceived that its purport had in view, not only all newspapers, but every other kind of periodical production that was published in the kingdom. He trusted it would have no partial consideration for party productions, but would comprehend every species, including even that recent publication called *The Anti-Jacobin*; a print that abounded with as much libellous matter as any he had heard of, and that too without a stamp. But he feared, that, whatever species of publication this bill might include in its spirit, or even in its letter, an Attorney-General would scarcely every be found ready and desirous of prosecuting for any slander which might issue from any print published for the purpose of abusing those in opposition. His own experience

furnished him with numberless documents to that effect. Did the honorable and learned gentleman, among all the libels that he saw and knew were ushered into the world against him and his friends, charging them with every political crime that ingenuity could devise, and every private error that depravity could invent, to render men odious, or make them contemptible—did that learned gentleman, he would ask, ever make any effort even to threaten the delinquents for such misconduct with a legal prosecution? Certainly not. It was certain, however, that he was not a friend to prosecution. He was of opinion that the press should be unfettered; that its freedom should be, as indeed it was, commensurate with the freedom of the people, and the well-being of a virtuous state; on that account, he thought that even an hundred libels had better be ushered into the world, than one prosecution be instituted which might endanger the liberty of the press of this country. He remarked, that the honorable and learned gentleman who submitted this bill, stated that a case in the course of his observations, insinuating that the produce to proprietors of newspapers, for scandal *not* published, was as profitable in the degree, and as great, as that which they obtained from scandal they disseminated. If that be the case, he would be glad to be informed, what the proprietors of Treasury newspapers, received from their comptrollers, for the abuse so abundantly lavished on opposition, and for that which they withheld from appearing against their own patrons? and, whether, as all proprietors were to be punished alike, they were to be considered as proprietors, since the papers existed at their expense? He might readily answer both questions himself, were not the redundancy of the reply sufficiently obvious, from the consciousness that obtained on the other side of the house. Upon the whole, it was his determination, in whatever light he considered the intentions of the honorable gen-

tleman, who was about to introduce the bill, to oppose it; at present, he considered it a dangerous innovation, as well upon the liberty of the individual, as on the liberty of the English press.

Mr. Pitt said, " He had read the paper alluded to, and observed how much satisfaction it afforded him. It certainly was stamped."

Mr. Sheridan replied, that the qualification that entitled it to the approbation of the right honorable gentleman, did not exactly correspond with what he should consider as recommending it. For his part, he made it a rule to read a paper and approve of it for its wit, not for its stamp.

Mr. Pitt defended the several clauses of the bill, &c.

Mr. Sheridan rose again.—He began by noticing the two speeches, or rather the explanation, and the subsequent speech of the right honorable gentleman; and by expressing a hope that he might be indulged a little beyond the strict rule of explanation. In the first place, the right honorable gentleman had not stated quite fairly what he had advanced upon the subject of his indisposition to prosecutions. He never could be supposed to apply what he said to prosecutions, in which the safety of the state was concerned: but he did not see that this measure was calculated to give evidence against offending persons. Newspapers were not set up by men of large capital; and unless where they were set up under the countenance of government, they were commenced by twenty or thirty persons, who subscribed each one hundred pounds. Now he would ask, whether any gentleman would believe it possible that any person would purchase a share, when the publisher, editor, and printer, were held not to be alone responsible; and when every one proprietor was to be liable to fine and imprisonment? The learned gentleman, if that were the case, must see that there would be an end of that species of publication, and that none would be set up except under the connivance of government, and with the capital

of the country. The right honorable gentleman had alluded, in the absence of a learned gentleman (Mr. Erskine), to whom the rights and liberties of the people owed more than to any lawyer whatever, to what that learned gentleman had said, and he had been pleased to call him the advocate and patron of all libels. This he did in his absence. Now he would venture to assert, that if the right honorable gentleman had said so much in any other place, he would himself have said what was a libel. But the questioning of the sincerity of the right honorable gentleman was stated to be a libel against the majesty of William Pitt. If that were the case, surely he might complain of some partiality, in one person being prosecuted for making use of such an assertion, and another person being suffered to go unnoticed; for, in the pamphlet published by his learned friend, there were great doubts expressed of the right honorable gentleman's sincerity; but the house had determined him to be sincere; did that alter the question? Would he permit him here to apply the doctrine of the gentleman who had introduced this measure? If a person had really doubts of his sincerity, according to that doctrine, it was no libel, for that gentleman had always submitted it to the jury, whether the intention was mischievous or innocent. But this prosecution was commenced for entertaining doubts of the sincerity of the last negotiation. Of the insincerity, however, of the former negotiation nobody had any doubts, and no prosecutions were instituted upon it.

The motion for leave to bring in the bill was put and agreed to.

APRIL 26.

TRAITOROUS CORRESPONDENCE, AND PREPARATION FOR INVASION.

A message was brought to the house from His Majesty, stating the advices he had received of great preparations for invading his

dominions ; and that, in this design, the enemy was encouraged by the correspondence and communications of traitorous and disaffected persons and societies in this country. An address of thanks was moved by Mr. Dundas, seconded by Mr. Pitt, and carried nem. con. On this occasion,

Mr. SHERIDAN said, it is impossible for any man who views the present situation of the country, and who views it in the same light I do, to imagine that I now rise to oppose, in any shape or manner, the address which has just been presented to the house. Had I been present on a former occasion when a bill for the better defence of the country was brought in by the right honorable Secretary (Mr. Dundas), I most certainly would have given it my most cordial and zealous support ; and in thus giving it all the countenance that I could lend to any measure, I would not consider the house as conferring any new or extraordinary power upon the crown, or any thing more than is already vested by law in the royal prerogative. We all know, that in cases of great and alarming emergency, His Majesty is armed with the power of calling forth all the strength and emergency of his subjects ; and, if in any ordinary riot and confusion, a constable may call for assistance from every one around him ; can it properly be supposed, that on an occasion of extreme and general peril, His Majesty would be contented to be a mere looker on ? And when His Majesty feels it necessary thus to arouse and exert all the strength and resources of his kingdoms, however we may co-operate—whatever service we may afford on such an occasion, we only fulfil that duty which, by the oath of allegiance, we are bound to perform. But, however, penetrated the country may be with the sense of the danger that awaits us, however ardent the spirit that now begins to arise, yet I cannot but breathe a wish, that something were superadded by this house to kindle the zeal and animate the courage of the people ; without which, I fear, neither can be warmed to that glow and ardor to which they should be raised on so trying an

occasion—for it is no ordinary occasion, Sir ; the dangers that threaten us are of no ordinary magnitude ; it is, therefore, no common spirit that can embolden us to encounter it. I rejoice most sincerely, indeed, to see this spirit now begin to arise ; but while I thus rejoice at beholding its first bursts, yet that joy is damped by observing the too general prevalence of a certain degree of supineness, a certain tardiness and hesitation to act, which I hope the cheering voice of the house will rouse and stimulate, or which its own activity will supply ; and that any such tardiness or hesitation should prevail, must be surely matter of no small surprise—for does not the coming danger threaten us all ? Are we not all interested in the issue of the event ? Yet, as far as I can hear and observe, there are many who make this threatened invasion a mere topic of conversation, or idle discussion ; they seem to treat it as a subject of amusement or curiosity, and appear eager for its arrival, as if they were to gaze on it as on some strange phenomenon, or as if they were to enjoy it as a mere shew, not tremble at it as a real peril.

Far, however, be it from me to suppose that this doubtful disposition, this absence of manly alacrity, proceeds from any such motive as disaffection, or from any sullen and ill-timed resentment of the wrongs and sufferings which the people may feel (and in my opinion very justly) against His Majesty's ministers ; to whom, perhaps, they may as justly attribute them ; but that want of spirit and alacrity which I lament, is occasioned by a sort of supineness, and a reluctance to believe the real danger of their situation, to which, therefore, they are not duly alive. An evident symptom of this supineness, and disbelief of the perils that hang over us, appears in the slow progress of the voluntary distributions ; to this measure I have professed, and still profess, myself a friend—and the house will be pleased to recollect, that such were the sentiments

I expressed when I had the honour of making a motion for suspending the passing of the assessed-tax bill. At that time I recommended the adoption of a measure similar to the voluntary contribution, and I recommended it as a temporary substitute for the assessed-tax bill; and that principally, because it could not fail to afford an opportunity of our giving some practical pledge, some striking and unequivocal proof, that on one point, at least, we were all unanimous—to leave room for this manifestation of our humanity, I then moved that the assessed-tax bill might be suspended for one month; my motion, as usual, was unsuccessful; but sincerely sorry do I feel, that a learned friend of mine, who voted with me on that occasion, and who took a share in that debate, should since have reviled the measure of a voluntary contribution as a miserable expedient, a mere sending round a begging-box. He surely cannot have imagined, that when I endeavoured to suspend the assessed-tax bill for a month, I was not equally sincere in my wishes to try the effect of the voluntary contribution, which I before recommended. What opinion could he, or the house, or myself, entertain of my consistency, if, after failing in my first object, I should immediately turn short, and join with them in reviling the very measure I before approved, and branding it as a begging-box business, which, however, I had confessed myself anxious to try as the best mode, in my opinion, of obtaining a practical pledge of our perfect unanimity, in providing every means of resistance to the insolent menaces and attempts of the enemy? Had I been in the house at the time the measure I proposed had been thus reviled, it would have grieved me to have heard it stigmatized in such language; indeed I could have scarcely remained silent, and permitted it to pass unreprieved. Nor, when I hinted at the propriety of first trying a voluntary contribution, was it merely the money it might produce I had in view; it was the disposi-

tion and sentiments that should prompt and promote it, to which I was anxious to attend. I am likewise sorry that there are names, which I do not yet behold in the list of the voluntary contribution ; but while I express this my regret at its not having obtained their countenance and encouragement, I by no means think it should be inferred, that those who have not as yet subscribed, are less disposed than those who have, to concur in the preparation of those vigorous measures of defence, when they clearly see and fully feel their necessity. As to their apparent apathy, I do not feel the slightest apprehension. They only expect some more adequate cause for alarm, some more thorough conviction that the danger is at hand. For confident I am, that as soon as one drop of English blood shall be shed by a Frenchman on English ground, the English valour will that moment rise to a pitch equal to what its most sanguine friends can expect, or its warmest admirers can desire ; it will then, doubtless, nerve our arms with a force which no impression from the enemy can withstand. But although this extreme danger may be still distant and out of sight, we should not therefore be unprepared to meet it, or lulled into a fatal insensibility to all the dreadful calamities it will bring upon us. Of these calamities we do not seem to entertain a due sense of dread and horror ; but without retracting any one principle which I ever held or uttered, concerning the French republic, I am free to say, and am convinced of the truth of what I assert, that at no period of our history were we ever menaced with such a fate, nor at no period of either the French monarchy or French republic, had we more to dread from France than we have at the present moment ; for should the French now succeed in their projected invasion, our ruin would be dire and irretrievable indeed. I do not, I say, retract the sentiments which, while I deplore the scene of blood that stained its glorious efforts to be free, I rejoiced at the

establishment of the French republic ; but when I rejoiced at its establishment, and the downfall of despotic monarchy, I rejoiced at seeing it regain a due degree of freedom, and a due degree of strength. I by no means rejoice at the enormous power which it is now able to wield ; a power which crushes under it the whole of the continental powers, and which has grown gigantic from the efforts which the alien powers exerted to oppose its infant liberty. It is from this increased power of France that England has more to dread than from the arms of any other nation ; and were France now again monarchical instead of republican, we should equally have to watch and to dread its ambitious encroachments, and its formidable attacks ; for, fully am I convinced, that were the unfortunate Louis XVIII. to be now suddenly recalled by an almost unanimous wish of the French people ; were that unhappy prince to be unexpectedly restored, and that in a manner as unexpected as was our Charles II. ; were he, after being re-inthroned, to recal all his emigrant nobility, who have suffered most cruelly from the French revolution, convinced, I say, am I, that France would not bare one atom of her ambition, nor would she attempt less, but grasp at more than she had lately acquired and achieved ; she would not remain satisfied with the Rhine for her barrier, with Holland and Italy for her vassals, with the addition of all the Low Countries, and a domineering influence over the councils of Spain ; she would still remain restless and unsatisfied, until she had wrested from Great Britain the sovereignty of the seas. While I thus express my jealousy and dread of French ambition, I by no means depart from any thing I formerly advanced about the French republic ; nor am I now more disposed than then to have recourse to language of contumely and invective, which has unfortunately been but too much indulged in by certain gentlemen in this house, and which has lately disgraced the preamble to a bill. To

make use of such language was surely neither politic nor wise ; nor could any thing be more unbecoming and undignified than the coarse expressions used in the sister kingdom by persons high in authority. I hope, therefore, we shall no longer hear of a monster Hoche, or of this or that ruffian general ; and I would beg leave not only to advise government to be more temperate and decorous in their language when speaking of the French people and their commanders but I would moreover wish they would pay them a sincere and solid compliment ; this sincere and solid compliment I would pay them, by saying and shewing that we omit no human preparations which the heart and head of man can contrive and execute. This is the manner in which I would meet them ; and if we thus stand provided with every thing that spirit and prudence can inspire and suggest, though it may be impossible for us to pronounce that they shall not subdue us, we may, at least, convince them that we are not to be despised.

If, then, they are to attempt to invade us, they will, no doubt, come furnished with flaming manifestoes. The directory may instruct their generals to make the fairest professions of how their army is to act ; but of these professions surely not one can be believed. Some, however, may deceive themselves, by supposing that the great Buonaparte—(for he, we understand, is to be their general)—that the victorious Buonaparte, I say, will have concerted with the directory, that he is not to tarnish his laurels, or sully his glory, by permitting his army to plunder our banks, to ruin our commerce, to enslave our people ; but that he is to come like a minister of grace, with no other purpose than to give peace to the cottager, to restore citizens to their rights, to establish real freedom, and a liberal and humane government. This, undoubtedly, were noble ; this were generous ; this, I had almost said, were god-like. But can there be supposed an

Englishman so stupid, so besotted, so befooled, as to give a moment's credit to such ridiculous professions? Not that I deny but that a great republic may be actuated by these generous principles, and by a thirst of glory, merely for glory's sake. Such I might be induced to believe, was the spirit which inspired the Romans in the early and virtuous periods of their republic. They fought and conquered for the meed of warlike renown. Still sooner would I believe that the Spartan heroes fought for fame only, and not for the plunder of wealth and luxuries, which they were more studious to exclude from, than to introduce into, the bosom of their republic. But far otherwise are we to interpret the objects that whet the valor, and stimulate the prowess, of modern republicans. Do we not see they have planted the tree of liberty in the garden of monarchy, where it still continues to produce the same rare and luxurious fruit? Do we not see the French republicans as eager as ever were the courtly friends of the monarchy, to collect from among the vanquished countries, and to accumulate, all the elegancies, all the monuments of the arts and sciences; determined to make their capital the luxurious mart and school for a subject and admiring world? It is not glory they seek for, they are already gorged with it; it is not territory they grasp at, they are already encumbered with the extent they have acquired. What, then, is their object? They come for what they really want: they come for ships, for commerce, for credit, and for capital. Yes; they come for the sinews, the bones; for the marrow, and for the very heart's blood of Great Britain.

But let us now examine what we are to purchase at this price. It is natural for a merchant to look closely to the quality of the article which he is about to buy at a high rate. Liberty, it appears, is now their staple commodity; but should we not carefully attend, whether what they export be of the

same kind with what they keep for their home consumption. Attend, I say, and examine how little of real liberty they themselves enjoy, who are so forward and prodigal in bestowing it on others. On this subject I do not touch as a matter of reproach. The unjust measures they have pursued, they may have pursued from necessity. If the majority of the French people are desirous and determined to continue a republican form of government, the French directory must do what they can to secure the republic. This conduct, both prudence, policy, and a view to their own security, may dictate and enforce. But were they to perform the fair promises which they would fain hold out to us, they would then establish more liberty here than they themselves enjoy in France. Were they to leave us the trial by jury uninterrupted, and thus grant us a constitution more enviable than that in France, would not this be rearing a constitution in this country which would stand a glaring contrast in their own, a living and lasting reproach on their conduct towards their own country? Were such to be their conduct here, I will only say they must be madmen. Thus far have we viewed them with regard to the wisdom of their policy; let us now inspect the nature of their enmity. And here again I feel disinclined to enter on this subject with harshness or asperity; and I have only to regret, that the French nation have, both generally and individually, been too frequently treated with scornful and ignominious language in this house. On the impropriety and impolicy of such coarse treatment I will not now be tempted to animadvert, neither will I stop to consider who has been the aggressor in the commencement of hostilities, or who was or was not sincere in attempts at pacification. What I regret is, that the more they have been abused, the more rancorous must be their resentment; and as to their intending to exhaust upon us the full extent of

their vengeance, in that intention I give them credit for being sincere.

The next consideration, therefore, which naturally occurs is, how to secure a successful resistance to an enemy of this temper and disposition. I will not here require of government to lay aside their political prejudices or animosities ; neither will I require of those who oppose them altogether to suspend theirs ; but both must feel that this sacrifice is necessary, at least on one point, resistance to the enemy, and upon this subject, at least, I must entreat them to accord ; for here it is necessary they should both act with one heart and one hand ; if there be any who say will oppose the French, when we have succeeded in removing the present ministers, to them I would say : Sir, let us defer that for a moment ; let us now oppose the enemy, and avert the storm, otherwise we shall not long have even ministers to combat and remove. If there are any who say, that ministers have brought on us our present calamities, they ought, therefore, to be first removed, I will grant them that there is justice and logic in the argument, but for its policy I am at a loss to discover. There are those who think the present ministers incapable, and that they ought, therefore to be removed. Granted ; but if they cannot succeed in removing them, and if they be sincere in their opinion of the incapacity of ministers, how can they approve themselves sincere in their wish to resist the enemy, unless they contribute to aid and rectify the incapacity they complain of ? Indeed, there are some gentlemen who seemed to divide their enmity and opposition between the ministers and the French ; but must they not see, that the inevitable consequence of this division must be the conquest of the country by the French ? And why do they thus hesitate about the side of the question they ought to take ? Can there be any thing more childish than to say, I will wait until the enemy has landed ; and then I will resist them, as if preparation was now no

essential part of effectual resistance. What more childish and ridiculous than to say, I will take a pistol and fire at them? but I will not go the length of a musket; no—I will attack them with my left, but I will not exert my right hand against them; all must unite, all must go every length against them, or there are no hopes; and already, I say, I rejoice to see the necessary spirit begin to rise throughout the country and the metropolis; and when on this side of the house we manifest this spirit, and forget all other motives to action, I trust the same sentiments will prevail on the other; and that the offers we make sincerely, will there be accepted as unreluctantly. But now I must observe, that the defence of the country might be essentially contributed to by two very different classes of men; the one composed of those sturdy hulking fellows, whom we daily see behind coaches, or following through the streets and squares their masters and mistresses, who may be ruminating in the mean time on the evils of an invasion; to those I would entrust the defence of the capital, and would add to them the able-bodied men which the different offices, such, for example, as the fire-offices might easily produce. His Majesty would be thus enabled to employ his more disciplined troops in a distant or more necessary service. There is another class I would also beg leave to allude to; and those are young gentlemen of high rank, who are daily mounted on horses of high blood. They surely, at this perilous moment, might be better employed: it would ill become me to erect myself into a rigid censor of amusement and dissipation. That line of argument would not exactly suit my own line of conduct, nor am I an enemy to their amusements; on the contrary—but their mornings might now be more usefully employed; they ought to be preparing for the task they may have to perform; for sure I am they possess a spirit that will not permit them to skulk and hide from the storm; they will never

be seen a miserable train of emigrants wandering in a foreign land.

But, amidst all these warlike preparations, the idea of peace should not be forgotten; nor would I have that precious object remain unaccomplished, merely for a difference about some trifling point; for my part, I feel a more eager desire for peace than ever; for I by no means distrust the intrepidity and courage of my country. The death I fear it must die, is not a death from arms, but from the extent of the burdens under which it groans. But should our resources begin to fail, or even be exhausted, we should not for that be disheartened, and despair; we should still retain the heart of a nation, and shew the enemy we can be as desperate as they are; that we can rob, plunder, ravage, and destroy, as effectually as they have done. Yes, I must repeat it; the real fire and sword that must ravage this fair land, are the pen and power of the right honorable gentleman. His eloquence and influence will prove our bane. We should also beware of too proud a confidence in our strength. This strength must continually waste as our burdens continue to multiply, and multiply they must in proportion to our exigencies. But, however desirous I may be for peace, in order to avoid this pressure of taxes, I must warn the right honorable gentleman, that he must not think of treating for peace if the French should land. That last of humiliations would break, indeed, the spirit of the country; it would break the heart of our navy. With this opinion I am glad the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt) seems impressed; but, if I am to speak out, I have also to tell him, that the want of confidence in public men has of late more enfeebled the nation than any other cause; and this want of confidence has principally arisen from the secession of certain gentlemen, who have deserted the Whig party in order to creep into place, that

they might better serve the cause of religion, morality, &c. as they would have believed, but whose real motive was their anxiety to participate of place and power; on them it is incumbent to repair the injury they have done to the public spirit, not only by co-operating in the general efforts for resistance, but in a more liberal and extensive sacrifice of the emoluments they enjoy, and which they were so eager to secure while they had nothing in their mouths but morality and civil order. As to any more coalitions, I shall never think of them with patience; they have done nothing but mischief; and, in my mind, much more than any party hostilities can produce: the country feels it, and justly abhors them; and, indeed, it has been the misfortune of the country to have long been led by parties, and to look to this or that man as a head and a guide. I do not deny the importance and abilities of the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt), neither surely am I sensible of the manly soul and mighty mind of my right honorable friend (Mr. Fox). But in a country of more than eight millions of inhabitants, and those of ardent hearts and enlightened understandings. If I am told there can be found but two men who can save it, I have only to say that such a country is not worth saving, and must be destroyed. But, thank Heaven, there is no such dearth amongst us of wise and able men, of men willing and prepared to save the country, in a crisis like the present: let Englishmen but look to and rely upon themselves—their heart and spirit will then return, and arm but their hands, and then you will see if the British nation will tamely submit to be husseled out of its independence. Even were we all banished out of the country, there would still remain a sufficient number of men to conduct its affairs, and preserve its glories, without expecting its salvation at the hands of the right honorable gentleman (Mr. Pitt), or my right honorable friend

(Mr. Fox); or even from a noble lord in the other house, who has lately created so much expectation.

I am ashamed to say any thing concerning myself, although it should be a very few words. I am sorry also, it is hardly possible for any man to speak in this house, and to obtain credit for speaking from a principle of public spirit, that no man can oppose a minister without being accused of faction, and none, who usually opposed, can support a minister, or lend him assistance in any thing, without being accused of doing so from interested motives. I am not such a coxcomb as to say, that it is of much importance what part I may take ; or that it is essential that I should divide a little popularity, or some emolument with the ministers of the crown ; nor am I so vain as to imagine, that my services might be solicited. Certainly they have not. That might have arisen from want of importance in myself ; or from others whom I have been in the general habit of opposing, conceiving that I was not likely either to give up my general sentiments, or my personal attachments ; however that may be, certain it is, they never have made any attempt to apply to me for my assistance. I think it right to declare, however, that my political enmity (private I have none) is irreconcilable to His Majesty's present ministers ; and my attachment to my right honorable friend, and to his political principles, is unaltered and unalterable ; that my eager desire to procure a reform in parliament, as well as a reform of a multiplicity of abuses ; to procure, if possible, indemnity for the past, and security against future abuses, is undiminished. These are points to which I have long since and often pledged myself. These are pledges which I shall never abandon. Let the world think of me what it pleases ; I am conscious of the integrity of my principles. I feel a pride in avowing them ; and I should be the meanest and

most base of mankind if I preferred some party principle, or some personal motive, either on account of myself or others, that might induce me to abandon my public sentiments. I will do all I can against the efforts of our foreign enemy. I say you have a right to call on all descriptions of men to do the same thing. Some distinction, however, ought to be made. There are many who have made fortunes by contracts and by various species of court favor and connections. There are others who lend the state most important and honorable assistance. What is bounty in the one, would be nothing but gratitude in the other, in coming forward, to support the public cause at the present crisis. I call on those who have so long profited by court connections; I call on the personal friends of the minister to come forward, and assist the state at this trying moment. I call on those, also, that have been, on former occasions, loud for reform. I call on those who feel themselves pledged to bring the minister to account for his actions, to shew that they are the real friends of their country in the hour of peril. They all know what I mean by this. I need not tell them, that every measure which invigorates the spirit of the people, and strengthens the crown, to resist the ambition of the enemy, and to relieve us from our present perilous condition, has my cordial support, and ought to receive theirs.

Having said this, I ought also to say a few words on a subject which I have heard within a few moments; I mean that of an intention to take away one of the most valuable of the rights of the subject. That part of the address which I like the least, is that which relates to a supposed correspondence between our foreign enemy, and those who are alleged to be our domestic traitors. If there be such traitors among us, let the law pronounce upon them; but ministers must not expect inconsistencies from me; I cannot give my assent to an assertion of

the existence of such a correspondence, or such a society of traitors, without proof. I say this the more readily on remembering, that formerly I denied the existence of a plot which the minister alleged did exist, and the verdict of a jury afterwards negatived that conspiracy, and consequently supported what I said upon that subject. What plots there are, or whether there be any, I do not know ; but before I hear evidence, I cannot give an unqualified assistance to that part of the address. The minister must know better than I can pretend to do, whether any such plots exist or not ; but he will pardon me if I decline to take his word for their existence. That ministers should take this step, I own appears to me alarming ; it casts a kind of suspicion all over the country, and which in my opinion, will operate as a check upon the otherwise rising spirit of the people, Gentlemen will easily understand what I allude to ; but ministers will excuse me ; they cannot have any support from me upon this subject—I mean the suspension of the Habeas-Corpus Act. On a former occasion I opposed that suspension ; and now there is less evidence to support the necessity of it than then. If called upon to assent to that suspension, they must allow me to pause ; for it is much too difficult for me to assent to such a measure without much better evidence than I have yet seen.

Another point is one of great importance, but on which I shall utter only a single sentence : it is the state of Ireland. I mean on some future day to bring forward a discussion of that subject. I only mention it now, for the sake of observing, that part of the British empire, which was once one of the sinews of its strength, is now, alas ! become a part of its weakness. The cause of that unhappy change I do not now pretend to explain ; but let not governors ever flatter themselves, that they ever at any time, under any circumstances, lose the affections

of the hearts of the people without some misrule on their parts. Upon that subject I do not pretend to say any thing decisive now; but I have thus introduced it, for the purpose of giving notice, that I intend to enter hereafter upon its discussion.

END OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.

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